Dive into the
#1 Podcast*
with Fr. Mike Schmitz
and Jeff Cavins

THE BIBLE IN A YEAR COMPANION

VOLUME I: DAYS 1–120

ASCENSION

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VOLUME I: DAYS 1–120

Fr. Mike Schmitz
Jeff Cavins
Lavinia Spirito

ASCENSION
West Chester, PA

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Dedicated to the 2021 listeners of ***The Bible in a Year (with Fr. Mike Schmitz)*** ™ featuring Jeff Cavins.

Thank you for being the first group to journey through Scripture with us. Your ideas, questions, and feedback inspired this book.

We're praying for you—please pray for us, and we cannot wait to see you tomorrow.

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INTRODUCTION

Remember.

If there is one word that jumps out at us from the Bible, it is "remember." Through his prophets, God is constantly exhorting the people of Israel to recall their story—to remind one another of what the Lord has done for them. They are called to never forget who they are and who the Lord is.

As we enter more deeply into the story of salvation, we can see why Scripture is so insistent on *remembering*. We are instructed to remember because it is the natural order of things for us to forget. Have you ever noticed this? Have you ever noticed how easy it is to forget all the ways that God has blessed you? Have you ever noticed how easy it is to fall into the trap of asking, "OK, Lord, what have you done for me lately?" This attitude is not only self-centered but *short-sighted*. How quick we are to forget.

I am just as guilty of this as anyone. I can be slow to remember and quick to forget. I can give my mind to the countless voices that are constantly trying to get my attention. During the COVID-19 lockdowns of 2020, I discovered that I was almost constantly tempted toward distraction and distress.

I love to read. One of the ways I "read" is with my ears—through audiobooks and podcasts. I am tremendously grateful that I can learn something new while I am driving, cooking, or brushing my teeth. During 2020, though, I was listening to so many different voices and filling my mind with so many opinions that I was ... splintering. I was listening to intelligent people who had helpful things to say. I was learning and growing, and I was inspired to develop my own way of looking at the world. But while these voices contained wisdom, they only had a certain *kind* of wisdom. What could be called "the wisdom of the world." I appreciated it. I valued it. But I also knew that it was limited. It was shaping how I looked at the world, but it wasn't united and it didn't bring me peace. As I said, I was distracted and distressed.

I knew what I needed to do. I needed to allow the wisdom of God to refocus, reshape, and reform my mind. I opened the book of Judges and read about a dark time in the history of God's people: a time when there was a lack of good leadership; a time when the people of Israel were divided; a time when everyone simply "did what was right in their own eyes." I began to see things in a new way. I allowed the incredible story of Scripture to teach me and form the way I viewed my own story ... and our shared story. I saw the ways God was able to be present in the midst of pain, how he could work with broken people and broken systems. I recognized how God persisted in caring for his people, even when they were quick to run after idols and slow to repent. I saw how the Lord faithfully loved those who quickly forgot his love.

So I had an idea. What if we recorded a podcast where people could hear God's Word and be reminded of the Story every day? What if we could allow the Bible to shape the way we view God, the world, ourselves, and others? What if we made it incredibly easy, gave people a map, and offered them some guidance?

The idea of *The Bible in a Year* was born.

So I reached out to my friends at Ascension, telling them what I had been pondering and inviting them to consider allowing me (or anyone they thought might do a decent job) to host a

"Bible in a year" podcast. Providentially, they had been considering doing something like this for years but were uncertain about the "who" and the "when." When I raised my hand, they had their answer.

And I had mine. For the next year, I would be privileged to journey with a great number of people through God's Word. We would all give the Lord a chance to speak to us in a new way. We would give less attention to the voices that distracted and distressed—and more attention to the voice of the Shepherd who unites and gathers his people.

In a way, the phenomenal response to *The Bible in a Year* makes sense because we have done three things that address the obstacles nearly everyone faces when they set out to read the Bible:

- First, we have made it **easy**. Allowing God's Word to penetrate your mind is as easy as pressing "play." That is maybe my favorite part; even if someone falls behind, they can always simply press play.
- Second, we have been given a **map**. In *The Great Adventure*® Bible Study Program's *Bible Timeline*® Learning System, Jeff Cavins offers us a way to understand the Bible so that we never lose track of the Story. *The Bible Timeline* has greatly helped hundreds of thousands understand the Scriptures better, myself included.
- Third, we have a **guide**. Sometimes, we read (or listen to) a passage of the Bible and have no idea what was just said. A guide who can remind us of its context and bring our attention to meaningful elements can be such a gift. My hope is that I will be such a guide for you. Some of the guidance I offer comes from the wisdom of the Church, the saints, and other Bible commentators who have taught me so much, and some comes from my own prayer and reflection.

It is my hope that *The Bible in a Year* will help many apply a biblical worldview to their lives. Our culture has lost this worldview, but this podcast might be one step in helping rediscover it.

A final point. I believe that this *Bible in a Year Companion* is a great tool to take you deeper. It is one thing to be *exposed* to the Story, but it is another to *remember* it. This *Companion* will help those who are so quick to forget—which is all of us! By utilizing this book, we will hopefully remember what we need to in "the Good Book." In this world, where we are so tempted toward distraction and distress, we now have a resource to understand how the story of salvation unfolds and how we can fit into that story today.

Now, we have a place to remember.

–Fr. Mike Schmitz

HOW TO USE THIS ***BIBLE*** *IN A* ***YEAR*** *COMPANION*

This *Companion* provides a number of ways to help you remember God's Word and live your life through the lens of Scripture. In Volume I, you will be guided through days 1–120 of the podcast by three features: **Reflect on the Word**, **Take It to Prayer**, and **Dive Deeper**.

- In **Reflect on the Word**, you will see a summary of Fr. Mike's commentary on the readings for that day. These are important things to remember and key takeaways to help you go deeper into the Story.
- In **Take It to Prayer,** you will pray along with Fr. Mike every day, using a word-for-word transcript of the prayer he prays in the podcast. Read it aloud as you listen, repeat it throughout the day, or pray it before you go to sleep.
- Every day, you will be given an opportunity to **Dive Deeper** into the Scriptures. Sometimes, this section will include an *image* of a key element or event mentioned in the Bible or an *answer* to a frequently asked question about the readings. Some days, it might be a *prayer prompt* to use during your prayer time or a *challenge* to live out what you have heard in your life.

In addition, a **time period introduction** by Jeff Cavins is included at the start of every period of salvation history. Here, Jeff explains the significance of the period's color, its key events and figures, and any significant changes in the lead-up to that time. At the end of each period, Jeff offers a **time period review**, a short recap of what happened and review questions to help you recognize how much you learned.

Turquoise is the color of the **EARLY WORLD** time period because it is the color of the earth viewed from space.

Key **Events & Figures**

At the beginning of the Bible, nothing exists. Then, out of nothing, God creates the heavens and the earth. He makes an amazing place, the Garden of Eden, for our first parents to live in relationship with him and his creation. Soon, though, Adam and Eve are deceived by the Serpent and eat the forbidden fruit—they commit the original sin. The future does not look bright, as Adam and Eve's sin results in their expulsion from the Garden. The good news, though, is that God loves us and has a plan to restore our relationship with him—ultimately, to share in his own divine life.

The Genesis narrative shows us just how serious the Fall is, as mankind struggles with sin. Humanity becomes so wicked that God destroys everyone except Noah and his family in the Flood. God makes a covenant with Noah, and the world is repopulated by his children.

The main figures in the Early World are God, of course, who alone knows the master plan; Adam and Eve; the Serpent; Adam and Eve's son Seth, through whom God passes on his blessing to subsequent generations; and Noah and his family.

What **Changes?**

Sin has consequences, and we see these consequences in the events of this period. Adam and Eve (and their descendants) no longer experience original justice but struggle with sin. They have become distanced from God, there is discord among family members, and people separate geographically.

The entire world is destroyed by the Flood. Noah, his wife, and his three sons and their wives are saved in the Ark, which is a type (or, figure) of the Church—a place of protection and life-sustaining provision. Finally, due to sin, one language becomes many at the Tower of Babel.

DAY 1: In the Beginning

Reflect on the **Word**

The creation accounts of Genesis differ from the creation stories of other religions because God creates out of sheer goodness, rather than out of violence or domination.

- Unlike other creation stories, Genesis shows that God did not create human beings to be his slaves or entertainment—he created us to share in his own life.
- No religion or worldview apart from the Judeo-Christian believes that human beings have been created in God's image and likeness.
- We do not get our dignity from our own strength, beauty, power, or wisdom; rather, we get it from being created in the image and likeness of God.

God places man and woman in the Garden for three purposes: labor, leisure, and love.

- The creation narratives of Genesis 1 and 2 are two versions of the same event. Genesis 1 conveys the account of Creation at a high level (a "macro event"), while Genesis 2 "zooms in" on the first man and woman (a "micro event").
- God does not create Eve to be someone substandard or "beneath" Adam; she is created to stand at his side as his helpmate.

God created the world as good because he is good.

Genesis 1–2, *Psalm 19*

Take It to **Prayer**

Here you will find Fr. Mike's daily prayer from the podcast so you can pray along with him. On this first day of The Bible in a Year, *however, we encourage you to pray from the heart and bring your own intentions to God. Thank him for the gifts he has given you and bring your petitions to the foot of the Cross!*

Dive **Deeper**

You have just completed the first day of *The Bible in a Year*! Hopefully, you are excited to start Day 2 tomorrow. Today, do something concrete to help yourself stay committed to *BIY* even on days you don't feel like it. You could do this by choosing a specific time each day to listen, setting up a space in your home for prayer, or asking a friend to be your *BIY* accountability partner. Whatever you do, make sure it will help you make time for God's Word on the busiest days.

Reflect on the **Word**

The Serpent does not challenge God's existence or authority; he challenges God's *trustworthiness* ("Did God say … ?"). He suggests that God does not want Adam and Eve to eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil because, if they do, then they will become like God. Will they choose to obey God because he loves them? Or will they take their lives into their own hands?

- We face this same challenge. God does not simply want us to *believe* in him—he wants us to *belong* to him.
- We might question some Church teachings because they seem to forbid things that appear to be good ideas. But when we choose to go against God's will, we are choosing not to belong to him.

The way we hear the question "Who told you that you were naked …" says a lot about how we view God. Do we hear the heartbreak of a Father who knows that his children must now take a different path than the one he had planned for them (that is, the path that would lead to peace, joy, and unity with him)?

- God curses the Serpent, and the things he says next to Adam and Eve are actually remedies to the curse. They are painful, but that is because Adam and Eve refused to choose love—which they were made for—and they need to learn that love requires sacrifice.
- The garments with which God clothes Adam and Eve show that he still cares for them, even though they have rebelled against him. The garments are made of animal skin, which means an animal had to be sacrificed for God to show his love for them, thus making the connection between love and sacrifice again.
- One possible explanation for why God accepts Abel's sacrifice but not Cain's is that Abel offered God the firstfruits (that is, the best) of his flock. We should also ask ourselves if we are offering God our best. When it comes to prayer, do we offer God the "firstfruits" of our day?

Genesis 3–4, *Psalm 104*

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you thanks and praise. We give you glory, and we love you. Thank you for sharing your Word with us. Thank you for giving us this clear vision of how you had created this world and how we allowed sin to enter into it. Thank you for not abandoning us in the midst of our woundedness but always following us into the wilderness, following us into the darkness so that you can be our light. Thank you, Father. We give you praise in Jesus' name. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Every day, we are faced with the same test as Adam and Eve. We need to ask, *Will I obey God?* Pray about your answer—and ask the Lord for his help in living in a way that is faithful to him.

Reflect on the **Word**

The Bible says that Seth was born in Adam's "image" and "likeness," which draws a parallel between him and Adam, who was created in God's image and likeness. This also explains why Seth's line produces righteous men who worship God, while Cain's line (the *Nephilim*, or "fallen ones") produces murderers and polygamists.

- When the descendants of Seth intermarry with the descendants of Cain, many of them cease to walk in the way of the Lord. So the person we choose to marry can affect the trajectory of our lives, as well as the lives of our descendants.
- There are consequences to our actions—even the most destructive ones—but God always offers us hope.
- God floods the entire earth because he must destroy every bit of the evil and corruption to which humanity had been clinging. However, he makes a promise of hope to Noah because he chose to cling to God.
- No one is one hundred percent evil or one hundred percent good. We can choose to follow the Lord in the midst of a broken world, like Noah.

  Ask God, "How do you want me to walk with you today?"
- We can cling to God even amid the storms of life, and he will continue to lift us up.

Genesis 5–6, *Psalm 136*

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, thank you so much for giving us your Word. Thank you for not giving up on us. Especially Father, we thank you that you continue to speak to us even when we experience brokenness. You continue to reach out to us even in the midst of our mess and the mess of this world. We give you praise, and we thank you for your Word and thank you for the way in which you continue to hold this world in existence. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

***Were the people** in the Old Testament really that old?*

The events of Genesis took place thousands of years ago in an era when people did not record linear history as we do. As was common in other writings of this time, the human authors of the Old Testament employed what is called "honorific numbering," where the ages of distinguished individuals would be inflated to convey honor and importance.

Nonetheless, the meaning of the story does not change. When we read the Bible, we always need to begin with the literal sense—that is, the intended meaning of the author. We then consider the three spiritual senses of the text: how it relates to Jesus, to our lives, and to the future. We always need to approach the Bible with an attitude of faith. If we do so, we will not get tripped up by passages that seem difficult to understand.

–Jeff Cavins

Reflect on the **Word**

The rainbow that God sends after the Flood is the sign of the covenant of peace he makes with Noah and his family.

- When God establishes his covenant with Noah, he makes two proclamations: (1) mankind can eat animals, and (2) murder is prohibited.
- God's prohibition of murder reminds us of the gift of human life and the dignity of the human person.
- There is a distinction between animals and human beings: animals may be killed and eaten, but human lives—because of our distinct dignity—may not be taken. Our dignity comes from being made in God's image and likeness.

The story of Noah points out the brokenness of the human heart. Though we have been created in God's image and likeness, we have been broken and need to submit ourselves to his grace.

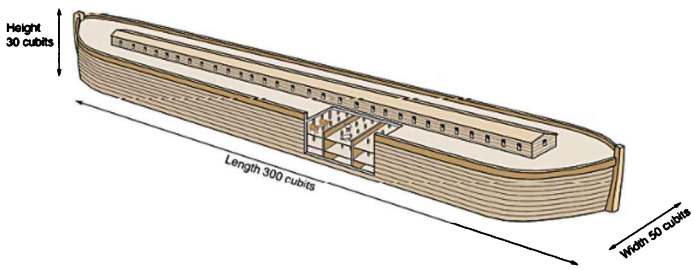
- When Ham sees "the nakedness of his father," he brings a curse upon himself and his family. Ham becomes the father of Canaan, whose offspring become the enemy of the people of Israel.

Genesis 7–9, Psalm 1

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we thank you so much for your Word, and we thank you for revealing your love for us and your faithfulness to us—that your love is unstoppable and unconditional. And we give you praise for revealing how you have used even the destructive power of water to renew the face of the earth. Lord God, all of your gifts, all of creation can be used for good. They can be used for ill. They can bring forth life, and they can bring forth death. But you are good. You are the giver of life, and all life lies in your hand. All life lies in your power. And so we place our lives in your hands. We place our lives under your dominion and authority this day. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**



ARTIST'S RENDERING OF NOAH'S ARK

The Ark that Noah built was a large floating vessel. (See Genesis 6.) In modern terms, it was longer than a football field.

DAY 5: The Tower of Babel

Reflect on the **Word**

Nimrod is the first person in the Bible to be considered a "mighty man," and he establishes a kingdom on earth. In his quest for power, he becomes a tyrant and passes on this ruthless ambition to those who build the Tower of Babel.

- Ambition for excellence rather than power is a truly great thing. Ambition for excellence is what makes us strive to be great saints. God puts this desire in our hearts.
- We were made to be people who pursue true excellence—to be who we were created to be and give glory to God.
- Nimrod's people could have created a beautiful structure to honor God, but they chose to build a tower to "make a name for [themselves]" instead. They chose to glorify themselves instead of God.
- We often need to ask ourselves if we are striving to live up to the call to excellence that God has given us.

  When we pursue our own fame and glory, we are not being the people God created us to be.
- As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are called to use the gifts he has given us for his glory and the betterment of our brothers and sisters.

Genesis 10–11, Psalm 2

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, thank you so much for your Word. Thank you so much for revealing yourself to us in this story of the Tower of Babel. We thank you for revealing yourself in even the stories of these genealogies of how the first people on this planet continue to create families. And we ask you to please, as you reveal brokenness in families, let us reveal the brokenness in our own families. As you reveal how you have worked through broken people, help us to trust you in our brokenness because we know that you can use all things for your glory and you can use all things even for the salvation of the world. You use broken things to make things new. And you use wounded things to make things whole again. And so we just praise you, Father, in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

It is good for us to seek excellence, but we need to do this for the glory of God. Are there any areas of my life where I am trying to make a name for myself rather than glorifying God?

Early World **Recap**

God's plan of sheer goodness begins in the Early World. God created a wonderful dwelling for Adam and Eve, the Garden of Eden, with everything they would need, most importantly an intimate relationship with him. Unfortunately, our first parents committed the original sin, which resulted in death, a weakened will, and clouded reasoning. The good news is that God had a plan of restoration that would ultimately be realized in Jesus Christ.

Early World **Review Questions**

Use these questions to test your knowledge of the time period you just finished. Answers are below. No matter how many you can answer, celebrate the accomplishment of finishing another period!

1. On which day of Creation does God say, "It is very good"?
2. What three things did Eve perceive when she looked at the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil?
3. The first two sons of Adam and Eve were Cain and Abel. Which brother died at the hands of the other?
4. For how many days did it rain during the great Flood recorded in Genesis?
5. Who were the three sons of Noah?
6. What was the sign of the covenant God made with Noah?
7. What did God do when men built the Tower of Babel?

1. The sixth day, the day he created Adam and Eve

2. It was good for food, it was a delight to the eyes, and it would make one wise (Genesis 3:6).

3. Abel was killed by Cain.

4. Forty days

5. Shem, Ham, and Japheth

6. Rainbow

7. He confused their language.

Burgundy is the color of the **PATRIARCHS** time period because it represents God's blood covenant with Abraham.

Key **Events & Figures**

The period of the Patriarchs begins with Abram (later Abraham) and his wife, Sarai (later Sarah). God calls Abram to trust him by moving to the land of Canaan, where God promises him three things: land, a royal dynasty, and worldwide blessing. As a foundation to these three promises, God makes a covenant with him.

In this period, the Bible follows the blessing of God from Abraham to his son Isaac and on to Isaac's son Jacob. The end of this period focuses on Jacob (who is also called Israel, meaning "he who struggles with God") and his son Joseph. God will work through the life of Joseph to save Israel during a difficult famine.

Some of the other key figures at this stage are the women of the story: Sarah, Hagar, Rebekah, and Rachel. In addition, the relationship between Joseph and his older brother Judah is central to the narrative, as it is Judah's line from which Jesus is descended.

What **Changes?**

In Genesis 12–50, there is a change in geography. The Early World period ends in Mesopotamia, while the Patriarchs period takes place primarily in the land of Canaan. It is within this narrow, fifty-mile-wide "land bridge" that Israel will struggle to trust God and be obedient to his will.

Later in the period of the Patriarchs, the people of Israel migrate to Egypt, as Joseph becomes "prime minister" to Pharaoh. Israel will remain in Egypt for the next four hundred years as slaves of Pharaoh, awaiting their freedom in the Exodus under Moses.

DAY 6: Trust in the Lord

Reflect on the **Word**

The narrative books of Scripture repeatedly show us how even the "giants" of the Faith experience brokenness.

- God promises Abram that through him he will bless the world. Abram hears the words of God, yet he passes off Sarai as his sister so that she can become the wife of Pharaoh.
- Neither Abram nor Job is perfect. Yet they are both called by the Lord, and they both demonstrate faith in him.
- Abram divides the land between himself and his nephew Lot. So that there is no strife, he does not claim the better land. This is a sign of Abram's faithfulness, knowing that the Lord will continue to take care of him.
- When Job is afflicted with great loss and suffering, his response is not to curse God but to worship him: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return; the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21).
- This is our call. Life is not always going to make sense, but we know God is always present. The Lord is faithful and steadfast, even when we are not—and he calls us all to belong to him.

We should ask the Lord to make our hearts more like Job's—that is, to worship and trust God in times of suffering. We should ask the Lord to make our hearts more like Abram's—to allow ourselves to be corrected when we need it and to trust him.

Genesis 12–13, Job 1–2, Proverbs 1:1-7

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we thank you, and we give you praise. Thank you for your Word. Thank you for the gift of revealing yourself to us, revealing your heart to us even in broken situations. We ask that you please send your Holy Spirit that when we are broken, when we fail, when we fall, and when we are suffering that we turn more deeply to you, that we refuse to curse you, that we refuse to run away from you, that we refuse to hide from you—but instead come to you in our brokenness and come to you in our need. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

ABRAM'S TENT

This reconstruction, located in a modern-day, open-air museum in Israel, shows what the tent of Abram, whose name God changed to Abraham, could have looked like. (See Genesis 18.)

DAY 7: God's Covenant with Abram

Reflect on the **Word**

Abram joins the battle of the kings on a rescue mission to save his nephew Lot.

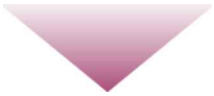
- The king of Salem, Melchizedek, blesses Abram and offers up bread and wine. Jesus will be described as having a priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek because the priesthood of Jesus has neither a beginning nor an end.
- Jesus will offer up the sacrifice of bread and wine, which is truly his Body and Blood. At every Mass, priests united to the great High Priest, Jesus, offer up the sacrifice of his Body and Blood.
- We read about the covenant the Lord made with Abram. He gets a three-year-old ram, three-year-old heifer, three-year-old she-goat, turtledove, and young pigeon, and he splits the animals in two, making a pathway between them. This is how to forge a covenant in the ancient world: make a path between the halves of these animals and walk through the parts.
- Abram is waiting there, and God himself passes through. He tells Abram he will be faithful to his covenant: a promise that he will have family, that he will have land, and that the world will be blessed through him.
- Abram did not pass through the pieces. This is the mercy of God because he knows that human beings are broken and that we continually stumble. God acknowledges that we will fail in keeping the covenant. But he himself takes our wounds, failings, and sins on himself.
- We will discover later why God allowed Satan to strike Job down, which seems cruel of the Lord. But God is never unfair. He always loves us, even in the midst of suffering, even when we do not understand his will.

Genesis 14–15, Job 3–4, Proverbs 1:8-19

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, thank you so much for bringing us here. Thank you for speaking your Word to us. Thank you for revealing your heart to us as you do whenever we pick up your Word, whenever we hear your Word proclaimed. Whenever we read your Word, Lord, you enlighten our minds and enlighten our eyes. You give fire to our hearts, and you show us how to love. Help us to trust you this day and every day. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**



Everyone suffers in some way. Today, ask the Lord to make your heart more like Job's so that you can worship him when you are suffering. No suffering is too small or too great to offer to God!

DAY 8: The Surrender of Abraham

Reflect on the **Word**

Abram has become Abraham, and Sarai has become Sarah. This change of names was done to signify the covenant.

- The sign of God's covenant with Abraham is circumcision.
- God wants to bless our lives and have dominion. But we want to control our lives. Sarai, Abram, and Hagar try to take control of their situation. God has promised that from Abraham would come a vast dynasty, but he is almost a hundred years old. So, he thinks, why not take Hagar? When we take matters into our own hands, nothing good comes of it.
- We need to place ourselves in God's hands. This is the sign of circumcision: a step of surrender.

  Abraham gets circumcised at almost a hundred years old, and his son Ishmael is circumcised at thirteen. The entire tribe is under the dominion of the Lord. This is one of the invitations God gives us today as well: to place ourselves under his dominion, even when we do not know or understand what he is doing.
- Sometimes the people who love us the most understand us the least. Job's friends have answers for him, but he just wants them to be with him in his grief. Sometimes the people in our lives do not need our answers as much as they need us simply to be present.
- It can be the same with God. We think we need God to give us an answer, but maybe we just need God to be with us in our confusion and pain.

Genesis 16–17, Job 5–6, Proverbs 1:20-33

Take It to **Prayer**

Lord God, you are good, and we know that you love us. We know that we can trust you. We know that you reveal your heart to us in your Word. We thank you for revealing your heart to us. Thank you for your Word. We ask that you please—in the midst of confusion, Lord—we ask that you give us your truth. In the midst of suffering, we sometimes don't want answers as much as we want you, Lord God. So please just give us yourself. Give us your peace. To all those who are suffering in this moment and also to all those who are suffering as they hear these words—your words proclaimed—Lord God, I ask that you please give them confidence in you, give them a trust in you, give them a faith in you, that above all things you are faithful. Your love is unstoppable, and your love is sufficient. You are good, and we praise you in Jesus' name. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Why did Abraham *treat Hagar so cruelly?*

This story can make us uncomfortable. Owning a woman, using her, and then dismissing her? This seems incompatible with Abraham's character and his relationship with the Lord. The key to understanding this episode, as well as other puzzling stories in the Bible, is to know that the Scriptures realistically portray the good *and* the bad of humanity. Here, we see the great patriarch Abraham in a domestic situation that is foreign to us but common in his time. Abraham has made poor decisions with his wife, Sarah, and is now dealing with the fallout. Sarah is within her rights to demand Hagar's banishment, but Abraham makes sure Hagar is well supplied as she departs. He does the best he can under the circumstances.

The silver lining in all this is that Hagar will actually see God during her flight from the encampment. Reassured by divine promises, Hagar trudges all the way back, this time with a lighter heart: God has spoken to her; she has seen him! She will fulfill her destiny, she will have her son—and he will be a force to be reckoned with.

–Lavinia Spirito

DAY 9: Sodom and Gomorrah

Reflect on the **Word**

Abraham and Sarah will be blessed with a child, whom they will name Isaac.

- In today's reading, we see three figures who go down to Sodom. We don't know who they are, but we know their role is to exact justice, not vengeance. Justice is giving someone what is their due, while vengeance is simply taking out your anger on another.
- Justice is clearly established in the story today. God is going to destroy an entire city, but Abraham asks if he would destroy it if there were righteous people there, as well. God says he would spare the city if there were, for he is just.
- Sometimes the Bible doesn't *tell* us someone did the wrong thing but *shows* us it was the wrong thing to do. The daughters of Lot have relations with their father so they can continue their bloodline. The Bible doesn't proclaim this to be wrong but rather shows its consequences: the descendants of this sinful union are the Moabites and the Ammonites, who become the enemies of the Israelites.

There are so many questions that come up in these readings. But we can still learn from it even if it doesn't immediately make sense. That is true for the book of Job today.

- Job's friends Eliphaz and Bildad say that God is just and does not allow evil to happen to someone who doesn't deserve it—so Job should admit that he deserves it. Sometimes our friends just give us an automatic, rote "religious answer" as to why something horrible is happening in our lives.
- Job does not understand, though, for he has not done anything evil, and he believes that God is just. This is the big question the book of Job raises: If God is just, why is there so much evil in the world? Why do good people suffer?
- The book of Job does not end by answering the question of why. Rather than seeking an answer, we should just journey with Job. Enter into his suffering and allow his questions to be our questions and our questions to be his.

Genesis 18–19, Job 7–8, Proverbs 2:1-5

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we thank you so much. We thank you for your Word. We thank you for revealing your heart to us. We thank you for all of the gift that your Word is when it is proclaimed to us. We give you praise. We ask you to please, in the name of your Son Jesus Christ, Father in Heaven, receive our thanks. Receive our praise now. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

***Why does Lot** offer his daughters to be raped by the men of Sodom?*

It is said that holiness is contagious. So is sin. Lot has become infected with the depraved culture of Sodom. He is totally committed to the prosperity that living in this city affords: he seems to be one of its elders, his daughters are pledged to its citizens, and his wife is so invested in the city she literally cannot tear herself away. When a corrupt society offers you prosperity in exchange for your soul, what do you do?

Despite this assimilation, Lot still has enough moral awareness to see the danger the visitors will face in this perverse city. So he meets them at the city gate and rushes them to his house. At night, the inhabitants of the city bang on his door, wanting to have sexual relations with them. The horror of living in such an evil city is revealed in such appalling details.

Lot's moral compass fails, though, when his obedience to the custom of hospitality outweighs even his natural concern for his own daughters. He thinks it better to offer them to the perverse men of Sodom than his guests. This is a glimpse into a very ancient and primitive way of thinking. The disregard he shows for the welfare of his daughters comes back to haunt him when he is in flight with them and essentially at their mercy.

–Lavinia Spirito

DAY 10: Hagar and Ishmael

Reflect on the **Word**

In so many of these early stories we see Abraham walking in faith, but we also see him faltering. He submits to circumcision and enters into the covenant with the Lord. But when he goes to Egypt and again with Abimelech, he seems to falter in his courage. He passes off Sarah as his sister twice out of fear.

- So often we can be walking in faith and then just fall flat on our faces. It is a grace that we have the sacrament of Reconciliation, that we know that the heart of the Lord is mercy.
- The Lord appears to Abimelech in a dream and tells him to stay away from Sarah because she is Abraham's wife, so Abimelech is kept from sin.

  How many times does God preserve us from a fall? We might not even have any awareness until we get to heaven of all the times he has kept us from falling. Yet there also are times when he allows us to fall like Abraham—to learn to trust.

  When we fail, we can learn what it is to be loved in our failure, to learn that our failure doesn't disqualify us. Abraham's failure to trust did not disqualify him from the covenant. And our failure does not disqualify us. God continues to call us back to himself even if that road is hard to understand.

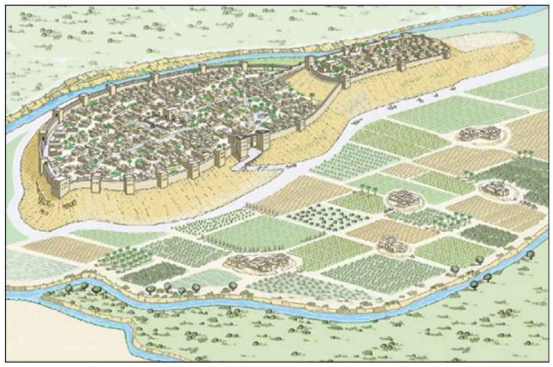
- Job expresses questions that many of us have: *Why did you, Lord, allow me to come into existence and then abandon me like this? Though I am striving to be righteous, why does it seem like you do not care? Lord, do you not care that I'm hurting so much? I thought living righteously mattered to you. It now seems like it doesn't matter at all.*
- We thank God for his Word, knowing that there is so much we do not understand about this life. But the closer we stay to him, the more we grow in wisdom and the more clearly we see things, even in the midst of suffering.

Genesis 20–21, Job 9–10, Proverbs 2:6-8

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise and glory. Thank you so much for your Word. Lord, you work your wonders. You are so mysterious in how you reveal yourself to us. Once again, Father, you have revealed to us the way in which you work through brokenness. You work through people who are fickle. You work through the ways that we try to get out of things and the ways that we try to just understand your will, your heart. You are more than we ever could imagine. You are more than we ever could understand or grasp or hope for or long for. But you are God, living and true. So we thank you for sharing your Word with us today. Help us to understand your Word, to receive it, to receive the parts that are hard to understand and to allow our lens to be shaped by your revelation, by the revelation of your heart working in our lives this day. In Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**



POSSIBLE RECONSTRUCTION OF SODOM

This reconstruction drawing of Tall el-Hammam in the Middle Bronze Age shows a good candidate, archaeologically speaking, for the location of Sodom and Gomorrah. (See Genesis 19.)

DAY 11: The Sacrifice of Isaac

Reflect on the **Word**

At this point in his life, Abraham has a deep faith, and he trusts that God will not hurt Isaac. When Abraham and Isaac start up the mountain, Abraham tells the two men who accompanied them that they both will be back. This signifies his trust in God, believing that Isaac will be spared or that the Lord will bring Isaac back to life after he is sacrificed.

- This story is not only about the literal events; it digs into the spiritual life as a whole. It is about a father-son relationship, which reflects our personal relationship with God.
- Though Isaac may have been around thirty and thus stronger than his elderly father, he submits to Abraham, carrying the wood for his own sacrifice up the mountain.

  Isaac, the only and beloved son of Abraham, willingly laid himself down and submitted to his father's will; this foreshadows Jesus' sacrifice on Calvary. It reveals how the Son of God cooperates with the will of his Father to bring about our salvation—even to the point of death.

  The point of this story is to remind us to trust God with everything we love.
- We call Abraham our "father in faith" because of the profound trust in God he shows. But there is also a mutual trust between Abraham and Isaac.

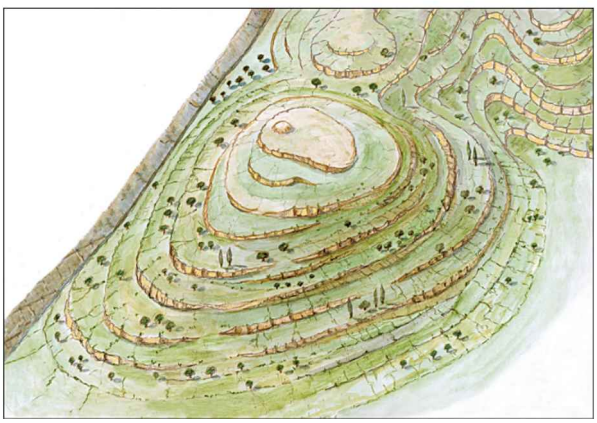
  The book of Job, too, reminds us of God's genuine care for us and that he is not our enemy.
- Jesus himself prayed the night before his death that he might be spared from his Passion, but he trusts the Father and does his will regardless. God is calling us to trust him the same way.

Genesis 22–23, Job 11–12, Proverbs 2:9-15

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we glorify you, and we praise your name. We thank you so much for your Word. We ask you to please enlighten our minds with your truth and enliven our hearts with your love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**



MOUNT MORIAH

Based on information such as a rock contour map, this reconstruction drawing shows what Mount Moriah, where Abraham brought Isaac for sacrifice, might have looked like before subsequent temples were built. (See Genesis 22.)

DAY 12: Isaac and Rebekah

Reflect on the **Word**

Our dependence on God and his will for our lives is essential. The story of how Abraham's servant, wandering in the dark but trusting the Lord, finds a bride for Isaac points directly to God's providence and his recognition of our needs.

- Having read this story, we know that Isaac and Rebekah become husband and wife, as well as the father and mother of Jacob and Esau.
- When we can recognize God's providence, we can see him working, which makes us feel secure. But it is easy for us to lose confidence when we cannot understand how he is providing for us. But he is always present, in every situation.

  Our forefathers in Scripture lived real lives, and they were sometimes unclear as to how God was working. We see Isaac and Rebekah trying to walk in faith, trying to make the right decisions, and through their confusion, God's providence reigns.

  We are challenged to praise God always, even when we do not understand what he is doing. He invites us to praise him every day, regardless of our situation. Sometimes, we might resemble Job, who continually goes back to the Lord and asks him if he even cares.

  Scripture teaches us that we can and must praise God in those moments when we do not have the answers, during times when we might not feel his consolation.
- God calls us to continue walking with him, one step at a time. He invites us to witness his presence, to keep walking confidently in faith.

Genesis 24, Job 13–14, Proverbs 2:16-19

Take It to **Prayer**

God in heaven, we thank you so much for your Word. We thank you for sharing your heart with us through your Scripture, and we ask that you please help us always to see with your eyes, to love always with your heart. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Praise God for his providence and for what he is doing in your life—even when you do not feel his presence. Do you place your confidence and security in him? Or does your reassurance come from another source, such as material things or the approval of others?

DAY 13: Esau Sells His Birthright

Reflect on the **Word**

Isaac and Rebekah repeat Abraham and Sarah's folly of claiming to Abimelech that they are brother and sister. This is one of many examples in Scripture of people repeatedly making the same mistakes.

- Since Esau is the firstborn son, the birthright is his inheritance, which would grant him the majority of his father's property—but he trades it in for food. How often are we faced with temptation and do not think of anything except what is right in front of us?
- When we put other things before God, we are essentially trading in our inheritance. He has set us apart and intends us for heaven, but sometimes this seems less important to us than our immediate comfort. This is the mystery of the broken human heart.

The desperation of Esau invites Jacob's manipulation because Jacob can see that Esau is willing to be rash in his hunger. Like these brothers, there is brokenness in all of us when it comes to giving and receiving.

All of us have been tempted in a way that preys upon our desperation. In such moments, we become willing to trade in our identity and inheritance as sons and daughters of the Father. This is why we need God's grace.

We can see ourselves reflected in our ancestors' weakness. Their lives reveal our own brokenness and show us how to be prepared to rise up through God's grace and face a new day.

Genesis 25–26, Job 15–16, Proverbs 2:20-22

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise and glory. We thank you again for your Word. We thank you for bringing us into these two complete weeks that we have been listening to your Word—that we have been allowing it to shape our minds and our hearts so that we can have a worldview that is shaped by you, that we can look at this world in a way that is formed by you, not formed by the brokenness around us, but is formed by brokenness that has been touched by your grace. Father, we ask that you please touch us in our brokenness with your grace. Make us whole. Make us new. Make us yours. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

***How are a birthright** and a blessing different?*

In the Bible, the birthright and blessing aided in providing leadership, continuity, and provision for the family. Society at the time was patriarchal, where men were the leaders and protectors of their households. If a man had two sons, he would divide his estate into three portions—with a double portion going to his firstborn son, who held the birthright, and the remaining portion to his second son. In doing so, the father was bestowing on the eldest the position of headship after his passing.

A father's blessing could be given to all his sons, but a special blessing was reserved for his firstborn son, who had the birthright. A father's blessing was an extension of his heart and was seen as a clue to the will of God for the future of each son.

In Genesis 25, we read how Esau "despised his birthright" (Genesis 25:34) and carelessly sold it to Jacob for a meal. At the end of his life, Isaac asked Esau to prepare a meal prior to receiving the blessing. As the time drew near for Esau to be blessed, he realized that his brother Jacob had tricked their father into bestowing the coveted blessing upon himself! By the end of Genesis, though, each son would receive a blessing.

–Jeff Cavins

DAY 14: Isaac Blesses Jacob

Reflect on the **Word**

Christianity is the fruit of Judaism—and this makes the stories of the patriarchs particularly relevant to the Christian life.

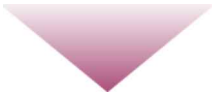
- After Jacob obtains through manipulation the birthright that rightfully belongs to Esau, he tricks his father into giving him the blessing as well.
- For a Jewish male to enter into the Judaic covenant, he had to be circumcised—an act that cannot be undone. Circumcision is a foreshadowing of the sacrament of Baptism. Through Baptism, we enter into the New Covenant brought about by Jesus, an act that will never be taken away.
- Though Isaac is upset that he gave the blessing to Jacob when it was intended for Esau, it was still a legitimate blessing. Isaac recognizes that he cannot undo his blessing, nor can we "undo" our Baptism, even if we would want to.
- Genesis makes clear that Esau was especially loved by Isaac, while Jacob was favored by Rebekah. This exacerbates the brokenness already a part of them through sin and affects the entire family dynamic.
- How many problems in a family could be resolved if its imperfect members sought to love each other as perfectly as they can, rather than giving in to preference and division?

Genesis 27–28, Job 17–18, Proverbs 3:1-4

Take It to **Prayer**

God in heaven, we thank you. We give you praise, and we give you glory. Thank you for giving us your Word and for sharing with us your heart. Because it is your heart that you have revealed to us in this Scripture, in this Word, in your Word. Let our hearts become like yours. Help us to love what you love and to despise what you despise. Help us to live as you have willed us to live and as you have made it possible for us to live by your grace. May you be glorified in all things this day. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**



God promises to be faithful to his covenant with Abram, even if Abram fails. In the New Covenant, Jesus Christ takes all of our sins and weaknesses upon himself. What areas of your life need to be handed over to him?

DAY 15: Leah Feels Unloved

Reflect on the **Word**

Due to Job's misfortunes, his friends question him about his honesty and righteousness. Job assures them that he has been faithfully serving God—even though it seems like the Lord does not care about Job anymore.

- What happens in the lives of Jacob, Leah, Rachel, and Laban helps us to understand God's family. They are broken and flawed.
- Scripture describes Rachel as very beautiful, implying that her sister Leah was far less so. Rachel is the one who captures Jacob's heart.
- While Jacob loves Rachel, Leah has to suffer the wound of being merely tolerated by him. Sometimes people in our lives merely tolerate us when we want them to love us, and we can easily let this shape our perception of God as well—and mistakenly think that he simply tolerates us.
- God sees Leah's pain in being unloved, so he opens her womb while Rachel remains barren. As Leah bears children, she keeps expecting Jacob to grow in love for her and for that love to surpass his love for Rachel, but this does not happen.
- We often fall into the trap of trying to make ourselves more lovable. Eventually, Leah gives up the hope of Jacob loving her and chooses to praise the Lord instead.
- God will continue to work through the brokenness in our lives. We can see ourselves in the brokenness of these key biblical figures and can share in the glory that God promises us. In this, we can honor him—and he can still use our brokenness.

Genesis 29–30, Job 19–20, Proverbs 3:5-8

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise for your Word. We thank you for speaking to us once again this day. We thank you for the group of people who are journeying with us, this team of people, this family of God, who seek after your Word. We listen to it attentively, and we ask you to make yourself known even more fully, not merely through your Word, but also through the Spirit that works and animates in your Word. May it also animate our hearts. May it also illuminate our minds, as we come back again and again to your Word as you reveal it, as you reveal yourself to us in this Sacred Scripture. We give you praise for revealing your heart to us. Help us to not be afraid to reveal our hearts to you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Think of a time in your life when you felt unloved by those around you. Did this experience shape your perception of God? In prayer, ask God to show you who he truly is and the love he has for you.

DAY 16: The Suffering of Job

Reflect on the **Word**

Job's friend Eliphaz has an understanding of suffering that is still common today: We suffer because we are reaping what we have sown. If we sow affliction, we reap God's wrath. If we sow sin, we reap the consequences of sin.

- While it is true that suffering can be due to sin, this is not the whole picture.
- Sometimes suffering is caused by bad decisions, either our own or those of others. At other times, God permits suffering to get our attention, to help us realize that we need to draw closer to him.
- God can use suffering to teach us a deeper kind of wisdom.
- The Bible makes clear that Job was a righteous man. He was not guilty of anything; he did not need to repent. So his suffering was not due to something he had done.
- The best thing Job's friends do for him is to sit with him in silence for seven days.
- Often, we want to give someone who is suffering some kind of an answer, so we offer a platitude. But we do not know the mind of God or his perfect will. Sometimes there is no human answer; ultimately, the answer can only come from God himself.

Genesis 31–32, Job 21–22, Proverbs 3:9-12

Take It to **Prayer**

God in heaven, we know that you love us. You love us in our brokenness and in our weakness, and we can trust you, even when we do not understand what you are doing. Help us to trust you this day as we journey with you, as we live this day in your presence, as we live this day in your will. We make this prayer in the mighty name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Think of someone in your life who is suffering. Be with that person in some way today, whether through prayer, a visit, or a call or text to show you are there for that person.

DAY 17: Jacob Meets Esau

Reflect on the **Word**

Job points out that life is not as straightforward as we would like. Sometimes good people die, while bad people seem to be rewarded. Job wrestles with the Lord about this and tries to make sense of it.

- At times, all of us wrestle with God in our suffering. Maybe we think that if God really cared about us, he would deliver us from our pain. Yet we all find ourselves in the midst of a broken world, which leads to suffering.
- Years after Jacob steals Esau's blessing from their father Isaac, he meets Esau and brings him a gift (a blessing) as an act of restoration. Here we see reconciliation, forgiveness, and mercy (see Genesis 33:11).

  Later, though, we see incredible brokenness and abuse in the rape of Dinah by Shechem. Life can be like this: one day is all blessings and the next is filled with suffering. How do we respond?
- We keep moving forward. We identify what is good and praise God for it. We name what is bad and do everything in our power to eradicate it—first from our hearts, then from our relationships and our culture.
- The first step is recognizing that we need reconciliation; we need forgiveness.

  When we encounter brokenness, we feel anger and a need for justice, and we ask the Lord to do something about this. But we do not stop when we encounter this kind of difficulty, when we encounter things we do not understand.

  We all have "broken stories," but we know that God can write straight with crooked lines. In the end, he will fulfill his will.

Genesis 33–34, Job 23–24, Proverbs 3:13-18

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we thank you for this day. We thank you for your Word. We thank you for revealing your heart to us. We thank you also that you have revealed to us that not only are you present when things are good, you are present when things are dark. That even as our friend Job complains and complains rightly in the midst of his suffering, you hear his complaint. You will answer, Lord, even though so often you are quiet. You will answer us. And today you answer us by giving us your Word, proclaiming to us through this incredible technology, and so we thank you, and we praise your name. We praise your name that is revealed to us through the words of your Bible, through the words of your Church. We thank you this day and every day. Please receive our thanks in Jesus' name. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

SUCCOTH

This archaeological site of Deir Allah in modern-day Jordan has been identified with Succoth, where Jacob built a house for himself and booths for his cattle after his return from Haran. (See Genesis 33:17.)

DAY 18: The Heart of Israel

Reflect on the **Word**

Jacob's life has been marked by deception, manipulation and cunning, and brokenness, but God is still doing a new thing.

- God gives Jacob a new name, Israel, promising to make him a great nation, continuing the promises he made to his father, Isaac, and grandfather, Abraham.
- God accomplishes his will despite human brokenness and sin. We see this theme repeated throughout the Old Testament.
- Sometimes we want the Bible to be like a Hallmark story—with a predictable plot. Things begin in conflict and drama, which are eventually resolved, and everyone lives happily ever after. But God does not work this way, either in the Bible or in our lives.
- God sometimes manifests his power miraculously. More often, though, he allows us to choose. He wants us to choose the good and to always seek his grace, but he allows us to choose brokenness and sin. Ultimately, God can use everything we surrender to him.
- In Genesis 35, Jacob (now called Israel) buries his beloved wife. His twelve sons are with him, and we will see how they become the twelve tribes of Israel.

God is faithful to his promises. We may question this truth when we see all the brokenness around us—and especially the brokenness inside us—but God is always faithful and steadfast in his love.

Genesis 35–36, Job 25–26, Proverbs 3:19-24

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise, and we give you thanks for your Word. We ask that you please send us your Holy Spirit so that your Word remains powerful and effective in our lives, that your Word penetrates not just our minds and our hearts but penetrates our very lives and shapes the way in which we respond to your Word. You have revealed your heart to us. Help us now, in this moment, to reveal our hearts to you. You have changed us. We ask you to please change us again. Make us new this day and every day, because we want to belong to you more than anything in this world or in the next. We want to be yours. We want to do your will. In Jesus' name, we ask you to please help us to be that kind of people. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Even though we are broken and sinful, God still is faithful to his promises and brings about good in our lives. Think of a time when God has done this for you in spite of your brokenness, and thank him for it!

DAY 19: Joseph and His Brothers

Reflect on the **Word**

In the past days, we have talked about brokenness. We can see it again in the story of Joseph and his brothers. His father, Israel, favors him because he is Rachel's son, but his older brothers do not think this is fair. They are full of jealousy and envy.

- We too might see an injustice and want to fight it, but this can turn into jealousy—which can turn into envy and resentment.
- Often, the root of resentment is believing that someone has something we think should be ours. In the case of Joseph's brothers, it was their father's love.
- We might think we could never do something like what Joseph's brothers did. Jealousy and envy, though, can grow into resentment. This can cause us to do things we would never normally do.
- God reveals his heart to us in his Word. He also reveals our own hearts to us.
- How do you deal with this kind of brokenness? First, learn to recognize when envy has taken root in your heart. Then recognize that everything you have is a gift from God, not something that is owed to you.
- Everything is a gift to be received with gratitude.

Genesis 37, Job 27–28, Proverbs 3:25-27

Take It to **Prayer**

God, you are good, and we give you praise. Thank you so much for your Word. We ask that you please send your Holy Spirit to enliven our minds, to enliven our hearts as we belong to you more and more this day and every day. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Today, take some time to journey in prayer with Job. Enter into the suffering of this innocent man, and take your hard questions about suffering to our loving Father in heaven.

DAY 20: Judah and Tamar

Reflect on the **Word**

The story of Judah, Israel's fourth son, is another story of brokenness.

- Judah's story is disheartening. He has two sons. The first, Er, marries Tamar, who is childless. When Er dies, his brother Onan is supposed to provide a child for Er's widow. But Onan does not want to do this, so he "spilled [his seed] on the ground." This angers the Lord. Whenever we separate the procreative purpose of the sexual act from its unitive purpose, this is the sin of onanism.
- Tamar takes matters into her own hands and disguises herself as a harlot. Judah happens to stop by—and unknowingly has sexual relations with his son's widow. Here, we see brokenness upon brokenness.

  In the Gospel of Matthew, we see that even Jesus' genealogy is marked by brokenness. Among the women mentioned, there is Tamar; Bathsheba, with whom David sinned; and Rahab, who was a prostitute. This reveals yet again that God can do incredible things when he is the Lord of our lives, even in our sin.
- God can always bring good out of evil. This does not make sinful choices beautiful or good—but God can make something beautiful out of what is broken.

  Nothing given to God is ever wasted.

Genesis 38, Job 29–30, Proverbs 3:28-32

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise and glory. Thank you so much for your Word. Thank you for revealing your heart to us and revealing your will to us. We ask that you please meet us at this moment because this moment is where we find you. And in this moment is where you find us. Help us to be found by you. And help us to know your presence in this moment, in this circumstance, in this season of our lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

***How can God** be a God of love when he slays people in the Bible, such as Er and Onan?*

The main takeaway here is that God judges sin and rewards virtue. Against his father's wishes, Judah marries a pagan woman, who raises sons who also marry pagan women. This is not a good way to hand on the faith of the God of Israel.

Judah's son Er, who marries the pagan woman Tamar, is so wicked that God ends up striking him dead, presumably in the prime of his youth. Dying young was seen as divine retribution for leading a sinful life. The next of kin—in this case, Onan—was to marry his brother's widow and father at least one son with her who would continue his brother's line and inherit his property. But Onan decides to enjoy sexual relations with her without the possibility of her conceiving a child, so he can steal his brother's property. Onan is thus condemned to death for rejecting the clear will of the Lord in this matter.

–Lavinia Spirito

DAY 21: Walking with God

Reflect on the **Word**

The Old Testament Joseph has many parallels with the New Testament Joseph, the first of which is that he is a righteous man.

- Joseph in the Old Testament consistently chooses to walk with the Lord.
- He has been betrayed by his brothers, sold into slavery, falsely accused, and imprisoned. Through it all, though, the Bible tells us that the Lord is with him. We can take consolation in this because God is also with us in every situation.
- Sometimes we only recognize the Lord's presence in our lives when things are going the way we want them to go, but he is with us even in times of brokenness.

  Joseph finds himself in a terrible situation that isn't his fault, but he chooses to live not like a victim but a victor because he knows that the Lord is with him.
- Job also shows us that while we live righteously and "do everything right," it can feel like God is not with us. But we can take comfort in the fact that God will never leave us.
- As Catholics, we have the fullness of revelation. We have these Old Testament stories to show us God's faithfulness, but we also have the revelation of Jesus in the New Testament.

  In the New Testament, God declares in the very person of Jesus that we can count on him and that he will fight for us.

Genesis 39–40, Job 31–32, Proverbs 3:33-35

Take It to **Prayer**

God in heaven, we thank you. We thank you for your Word. We thank you for revealing your heart to us. We thank you for heroes, people who are faithful like our friend Job. We thank you for heroes, people who are faithful like Joseph. Help us to be the kind of men and women who know your name and who know your commands and have the ability and the grace, the perseverance and persistence, the confidence and trust in you to do your will in all things. We make this prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Are there things in your life that aren't going the way you want them to go? If so, pray about how the Lord has been with you and continues to be with you, even when life is difficult.

DAY 22: Go to Joseph

Reflect on the **Word**

In the book of Genesis, we hear the words "Go to Joseph" (Genesis 41:55)—*Ite ad Joseph* in Latin. This has become a kind of trademark for people who have a particular devotion to St. Joseph.

- When we go to Our Lady, she points us to Jesus. St. Joseph does the same—he always points us to Jesus.
- In the New Testament, Joseph is the one who takes care of Jesus.
- Jesus is the bread from heaven; this bread is distributed to people dying of hunger. We are the ones dying for Jesus in the Eucharist.
- If we want to have a heart like God's heart, we can ask for a heart like St. Joseph's.

  Joseph, the son of Jacob in the Old Testament, also has a heart like God's—a faithful heart. He has opportunities to rebel and sin, but he chooses to remain faithful to God.
- No matter what we are going through, we are called to remain faithful to God.

  We can go to St. Joseph and ask for his intercession; we can ask him to take us to Jesus.

Genesis 41–42, Job 33–34, Proverbs 4:1-9

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we thank you for your Word. We thank you for your gift. We thank you for revealing your heart to us as you reveal yourself to us always, constantly, through this journey of this Catholic Bible in a Year. *We ask that you continue to lift up our minds and hearts to you as you reveal your mind and your heart to us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

Dive **Deeper**

As you learn about the Old Testament Joseph, seek to learn more about the New Testament Joseph as well. In 2020, Pope Francis wrote an apostolic letter on St. Joseph, *Patris Corde*, which is available in English and is a great place to start.

DAY 23: Judah Changes

Reflect on the **Word**

Joseph's brothers were so jealous of their father's love for Joseph that they sold him into slavery.

- Over the years when Joseph is gone, his brothers' hearts change. When their youngest brother Benjamin is threatened, they put their lives on the line for him.
- This reveals to us that while we are broken, we too can change.
- Earlier in Genesis, Joseph's brother Judah sins by having sexual relations with his daughter-in-law, thinking that she is a prostitute. When his family is threatened, though, Judah is a shining son and brother.
- We can pray to be not only like Joseph, who walks with the Lord, but also like Judah, whose heart changes.
- Grace teaches us that none of us have to remain in our sin. With God's grace, each of us can change.
- Scripture reminds us that God always is truly communicating himself to us.

Genesis 43–44, Job 35–36, Proverbs 4:10-19

Take It to **Prayer**

God in heaven, we thank you and praise you. You are our good Father. You love us. You reveal your heart to us. We ask that you please continue to send your Holy Spirit upon us as we listen to your Word, as we let it penetrate our minds and transform our hearts, as we let your Word be the North Star that guides the direction of our lives. Mary, Queen of Heaven, we ask for your intercession. We ask that you lead us to your Son, Jesus Christ. You who bore the Word made flesh in your womb, help the Word proclaimed dwell in our lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

ALMOND TREE

When Jacob had to send Benjamin to Egypt, he sent a gift that included almonds. (See Genesis 43:11.) This photograph shows a blossoming almond tree just outside the walls of St. Catherine's Monastery.

DAY 24: Tears of Joy

Reflect on the **Word**

When Joseph reveals who he is to his brothers, he weeps.

- Just as a mother weeps when she finds her child who was lost, we weep during joyful moments because we know the situation could have gone otherwise.
- Joseph weeps because he knows that he could have gone the rest of his life without seeing his father and brothers again or without meeting Benjamin.
- We weep in joy because we know how fragile we are, and we know that if the Lord isn't with us, this fragility leads to death and destruction.
- God is with us right now. So there is room in our lives for joy and tears—and joyful tears.

What joy breaks your heart today, knowing that it could be otherwise?

- What sorrow is breaking your heart today?

Genesis 45–46, Job 37–38, Proverbs 4:20-27

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we thank you, and we give you praise. Thank you so much for the gift of this day. Thank you for the gift of your Word. Thank you for the gift of revealing your heart to us, because that is what you do in your Word. You speak to us, and you continue to speak to us—even, Lord, when your Word is challenging—even, Lord, when your Word is confusing and we don't understand what is going on and we don't understand what you are trying to say to us. Still, you continue to speak, and we continue to listen. Give us hearts that can understand what we are hearing. Give us hearts to understand what you are saying. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

***What is the relationship** between the stories of Benjamin and Joseph?*

The stories of Joseph and Benjamin play a central role in the movement of the Israelites to Egypt, which will end up being a four-hundred-year sojourn in slavery. Joseph and Benjamin are born to Jacob's favorite wife, Rachel, and are Jacob's eleventh and twelfth sons. Of the two brothers, Joseph enjoys pride of place with Jacob, as seen by his father's gift to him of the coat of many colors (or, "a long robe with sleeves"). This obvious preference leads to jealousy among his brothers, eventually leading them to sell the seventeen-year-old Joseph into Egyptian slavery. Jacob believes that Joseph has been killed by wild animals, leaving Benjamin as Rachel's only surviving child.

Immediately before Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers, he has two dreams—one with sheaves of wheat (see Genesis 37:5-8), the other with eleven stars (see Genesis 37:9-11), all of which are bowing down to him. These dreams foretell his brothers' journey to Egypt during the famine seeking food and how the "eleven stars" (his brothers) will bow down to him.

–Jeff Cavins

DAY 25: Job's Questioning

Reflect on the **Word**

Even though Job has done nothing to deserve it, God mysteriously allows Satan to deprive Job of everything.

- Job's friends try to rationalize his suffering. Telling him that his suffering must be a result of some sin, they call on Job to repent. This is not accurate in Job's case, however.
- God reveals that even if we cannot understand the meaning of a moment, the moment still has meaning. There is a purpose for everything we are experiencing.
- Our suffering can call us to repent. It can be an opportunity for us to grow in wisdom. It can make us gentler and more compassionate toward others. It can be redemptive.

  It may sound as if the Lord is speaking sarcastically to Job, but he is simply revealing to him that there is a meaning to his suffering.
- We need to keep in mind that God knows the full story and we do not.

  God can use our suffering for his glory and for our redemption—and for the redemption of the world. This is the mystery of the Cross.

Genesis 47–48, Job 39–40, Psalm 16

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise. We thank you for your Word. We thank you for your will. We thank you for your Son, Jesus Christ. Lord God, the New Testament is hidden in the Old Testament. And the Old Testament is revealed in the New. All this time we are spending in the Old Covenant, in the Old Testament, in the Hebrew Scriptures, we give you praise and we thank you because you are revealing to us that you work with us, that you want us to be your children. Help us to be your children every single day, no matter what—in rain, in sun, when we are suffering, and when we are rejoicing. Help us to always say yes to you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

PYRAMIDS

When Jacob visited Pharaoh (see Genesis 47:7), he may have seen the Pyramid of Khafre (or Khephren), shown in the center of this photograph. It was built by Pharaoh Khafre circa 2550 BC. The Great Sphinx of Giza is nearby.

DAY 26: God Responds to Job

Reflect on the **Word**

In the final chapter of Genesis, Jacob does not bless his first three sons. Rather, he blesses Judah, his fourth son, proclaiming that the scepter will not depart from him until it comes to whom it belongs.

- Jesus is in the line of Judah and David, and he establishes his kingdom on earth and in heaven.
- Joseph weeps because of his brothers' lack of trust in his forgiveness. He tells them, "You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good," that many would be saved (Genesis 50:20).
- Here we see God's permissive will. Some things God directly wills, while others he allows to happen for a greater good. God never wills evil, but he allows it to preserve our freedom and because he can bring a greater good out of it.

  God calls us to enter into the mystery of trusting him, knowing that he can bring good out of any evil we might be suffering.
- When suffering occurs, this does not mean God has abandoned us. He remains with Joseph even when he is rejected and abandoned by everyone else in his life.
- The book of Job addresses the problem of evil, but it doesn't solve it. God never offers a reason why he allows suffering to happen. He responds to Job with questions and ultimately says the solution to suffering and evil is himself—that is, trusting in him.
- This is the mystery of the Cross: God himself, in the person of Jesus, experienced suffering and pain. He responds to Job by showing him his face, and he responds to us by showing us the face of Jesus.

Genesis 49–50, Job 41–42, Psalm 17

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we thank you so much. We give you praise and glory. We thank you for sharing your Word with us. We thank you for revealing your heart to us. We thank you for letting us journey with the patriarchs, with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, Rachel. We thank you for letting us be part of the story of Joseph and his tragedy but also your triumph through tragedy. Lord God, we thank you for our friend Job. We thank you for what you have revealed in our journey with him and his pain and his suffering, what you reveal about yourself in our pain and in our suffering. And we thank you, Lord, for always reminding us that we can trust you in even the darkest times. Help us to trust you in even the darkest times. We ask this, Father, in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Even if suffering leaves you feeling sad or alone, Jesus is suffering with you, right by your side. How could having Jesus by your side change your experience of suffering?

Patriarchs **Recap**

The period of the Patriarchs was a long and winding road that followed Abraham and his descendants to the Promised Land. God's three promises to Abraham—land, a royal dynasty, and worldwide blessing—were ratified through a covenant with him. The Lord often writes straight with crooked lines as he reveals his will to mankind. While the Promised Land was the goal, Israel took a four-hundred-year detour in Egypt.

Patriarchs **Review Questions**

Use these questions to test your knowledge of the time period you just finished. Answers are below. No matter how many you can answer, celebrate the accomplishment of finishing another period!

1. Where was Abraham (then called Abram) living when God called him to go to the land of Canaan?
2. What were the three promises that God made to Abraham?
3. What was the name of Abraham's first son through Hagar?
4. What was the name of Isaac's wife?
5. Which of Isaac's sons was hairy and ruddy in color?
6. Though Jacob wanted to marry Rachel, whom did he marry first?
7. Which son of Jacob came up with the idea to sell Joseph into bondage?

1. Ur of the Chaldeans, in present-day Iraq

2. Land, a royal dynasty, and worldwide blessing

3. Ishmael

4. Rebekah

5. Esau

6. Leah

7. Judah

Red is the color of the **EGYPT and EXODUS** time period because it is the color of the Red Sea.

Key **Events & Figures**

At the beginning of the book of Exodus, four hundred years have gone by since Joseph invited his family to move to Egypt. During these four centuries, the people of Israel lose their story and become more like the Egyptians than children of Abraham. Enslaved, they call out to God for rescue.

God raises up Moses to deliver Israel out of bondage and lead them back to the Promised Land. Following God's command, Moses tells Pharaoh to let his people go, but Pharaoh refuses. The Lord then brings the ten plagues upon Egypt. With the death of the firstborn, Pharaoh relents and releases Israel.

God wants his people to know that they belong to him. The Lord teaches them that they do not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from his mouth.

Key figures during the Egypt and Exodus period are Moses, his brother Aaron, and Pharaoh, who represents opposition to Israel's freedom.

What **Changes?**

The period of Egypt and Exodus is a time of tremendous change. After they leave Egypt, their home for four hundred years, God leads the Israelites into the desert of Sinai, where he calls them to be holy as he is holy. During the Exodus, God is reforming his people, who had lost their identity in Egypt. What they will eat and wear from now on will be different, and the way they relate to one another and other nations will change according to God's Law.

At Mount Sinai, God gives Moses his Law and establishes a sacrificial system centered on the Tabernacle, with the Levites as his priests. Israel will not journey alone; God will accompany them with a fire by night and a cloud by day.

DAY 27: The Birth of Moses

Reflect on the **Word**

Throughout the Old Testament, God reveals how deeply he loves his people.

- After God rescues his people from famine through Joseph, a new pharaoh comes to power and enslaves the people of Israel.
- It may seem like God has abandoned his people in their slavery, but the Bible says that he blesses them by making them exceedingly strong and fruitful. The growth of their families is evidence that God is with them, even amid their suffering, just as he was with Joseph.
- As the people of Israel are blessed with children, it reminds us that children are one of the greatest blessings that God can give to any couple.

The first chapter of Leviticus speaks about offering sacrifice, which conveys our duty to worship God.

- The father of a family will bring an animal to sacrifice as a burnt offering; then the Levite priests will drain the animal's blood and put it on the altar. This foreshadows the blood of Jesus in the New Covenant.
- In the Old Covenant, the remains of the sacrificed animal are placed on the altar and burned, elevating the sacrifice to God. Similarly, in the Mass, the priest elevates bread and wine to become the Body and Blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God.
- As we continue reading Leviticus, we will see many connections between how God asked to be worshipped in the Old Testament and how he asks to be worshipped now in the New.

Exodus 1–2, Leviticus 1, Psalm 44

Take It to **Prayer**

We pray for all moms who are pregnant, as well as for all moms who have been having a difficult time with pregnancy and not been able to get pregnant. We pray for all couples who have been unable to conceive. We hear the Word of God, and we know the blessing of children from God. You were with your people even when they were enslaved, and you gave them the blessing of family. You gave them the blessing of life. I ask you, Lord God, in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, for all those couples who are listening to this and praying with us in the course of this Bible in a Year *podcast. Those couples that are longing to get pregnant. Those couples that are longing for a healthy pregnancy. We just ask, Lord, in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, to bless these couples. In your name, Jesus, we ask you to send your Holy Spirit to bless these couples, to be with them in their desire for children, to be with them in their waiting, to be with them, God willing, in their conceiving and bringing into this world a new life. We also, Father, in the name of your Son, Jesus, ask for your blessings upon all those who have had the heartbreak of losing children, who have had the heartbreak of miscarrying, who have had the heartbreak—who have had children who were stillborn. Lord God, we ask you to ease the heartache of those couples who are listening to this and praying with us who have lost their own children. Please be with them now. Console their hearts. They are our family. They are our friends. They are known to you, God, because you continue to give blessings even when things are dark. Even when things are confusing. Even when we do not know where you are. You may be hidden, but you are not absent. Lord God, you may be unseen, but you are not inactive. So, Lord God, right now in this moment, in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, console the hearts of those couples. Console the hearts of those families. They either long for children or they have lost children. For this, Lord God, we pray. Amen.*

Dive **Deeper**

Dedicate time today to pray for families who long for children or who have lost children. Perhaps you will be praying for your own family, or perhaps you will be praying for families you have never met.

DAY 28: The Burning Bush

Reflect on the **Word**

Moses' father-in-law is referred to by two names in Exodus—Reuel and Jethro.

- God appears to Moses in the burning bush to tell him that he has seen, heard, and cares about the sufferings of his people in Egypt.
- The story of the Israelites shows us that when we cry out to God, he always hears us, even if it appears that he is not listening. Though the Israelites have been in slavery for centuries, God loves them and blesses them through it all—even if he does not immediately free them from bondage.
- When we are in the midst of a difficult situation, we can ask God to deliver us from it, but sometimes he doesn't right away or at all. But he is continually blessing us in other ways.

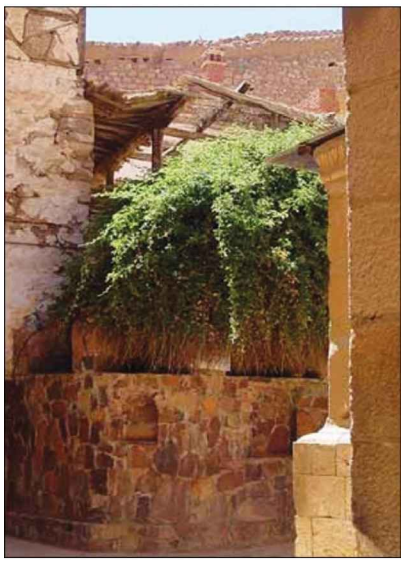
  God does not just want to free the Israelites because they have been made for freedom or because he wants to lead them to the Promised Land—he frees them so that they can worship him.
- In Leviticus, God shows his people how to worship him. Today, God asks us to worship him in the Mass. God created us to worship him, and we are called to offer him the worship he desires from us.

Exodus 3, Leviticus 2–3, Psalm 45

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we thank you. Once again, we thank you for your Word. We thank you for the gift of yourself. We thank you for being with us with your grace. We know that we can trust you in all things. We know that we can rely upon you in every moment of our lives. And so, this moment, and with these things in our lives, we trust you. We declare you are good. We declare that you are faithful. We receive your love, and we rest in your peace. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**



THE BURNING BUSH

This bush inside St. Catherine's Monastery is venerated as the burning bush, which Moses saw at Horeb, the mountain of God. (See Exodus 3.)

DAY 29: Moses Returns to Egypt

Reflect on the **Word**

At the burning bush, God reveals his name to Moses. When the word "LORD" appears in uppercase letters in the Old Testament, this is a reverential substitution for the Lord's sacred name: "I am who am."

- In the ancient world, to know someone's name meant you were in a relationship with that person. There was a certain vulnerability in having someone know your name.
- When God reveals his name to Moses, he is conveying a personal relationship with his people.
- Though God appears to Moses in the burning bush and reveals his name, Moses still hesitates and is uncertain when the Lord tells him to go to Pharaoh.

  When Moses and Aaron tell Pharaoh to set Israel free to worship the Lord, he gives the people even more work. The Israelites then become angry at Moses and Aaron for making their lives even more difficult. They would rather continue being slaves than have their lives be made more difficult in the pursuit of freedom.

- We can become pharaohs to ourselves. We make our lives busier—that is, we make ourselves slaves—so we don't have time to worship God.

  The Lord tells us that we were never meant to be slaves; we are meant to be free so we can belong to him and truly worship him. We need to make time in our lives to allow ourselves the freedom to worship God, to seek his voice.

Exodus 4–5, Leviticus 4, Psalm 46

Take It to **Prayer**

Lord God in heaven, we give you praise. We thank you so much. We give you praise and glory for who you are. You are the one God, living and true. You are the one who has come and visited your people. You are with us right now. God, you are in our midst. You are in our midst. And so what you invite us to do is to be still and to know that you are in our midst. To be still and know you. To be still and to know that you are our God. So help us. Help us this day in the midst of our business to be still. In the midst of our tumult, in the midst of our slavery, in the midst of our redemption, in the midst of our being set free—our liberation—in the midst of our vocation, help us to take this time to be still and to know that you are God. We make this prayer in Jesus' mighty name. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Today, in prayer, consider whether you have made yourself too busy to give time to God. Ask God to help you recognize how you can make time for him

DAY 30: Nile Turned to Blood

Reflect on the **Word**

Today, in the book of Exodus, God reminds Moses who he is—and that he is doing something new through him.

- Just as he reminds Moses of what he did for his ancestors, God reminds us of what he has done for us.
- We can have short-term memory regarding God. We can easily forget what he has done for us due to our anxiety about the present or future.
- We study Scripture to be reminded of who God is, so he can reveal himself to us and we can know him even more deeply.

In Leviticus, regarding the sin offering to be presented, God is merciful. If someone cannot afford a lamb or a goat, he can offer two pigeons or turtledoves. If he cannot afford even that, he can offer fine flour. God does not want anything to get in the way to stop people from receiving his mercy.

Many of us can only offer small deeds. God asks us to give him what we can from our hearts.

- God will accept whatever we have to offer him because he is a loving Father.

Exodus 6–7, Leviticus 5, Psalm 47

Take It to **Prayer**

God, you are exalted, and you are exalted above all ages. You are exalted above all names, and you have revealed your name to us. So we cry out your name. We cry out the name of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. You are our Lord, and you are the God of the universe. You are the King over all, and you reign on your holy throne. We ask that you please—you are the God who reigns—we ask that you also reign in our hearts. You are the King of creation—we also ask that you are the King of our lives. O God, we give you permission this day, not that you need our permission, but you are so humble that you choose to allow us to refuse your love or to receive your love. Lord God, this day help us to receive your love. Help us to let ourselves be loved by you. Help us to give you permission to redeem us once again, to save us once again, to give us your grace once again, and to love us once again. Lord God, every day is new with you. Your love is new every morning. Please give us your love today as we receive it from you with gratitude. We make this prayer in the mighty name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

***What is the significance** of the plagues?*

The plagues are God's answer to Pharaoh's hardness of heart in refusing to free the people of Israel. Through the plagues, the Lord judges the particular "gods" of Egypt, as well as the man who stubbornly stands against him and his will (see Exodus 12:12). In his heart, Pharaoh finds it difficult to yield to God because he sees himself as a god.

Pharaoh's heart and mind are closed to God, and the plagues just harden his resolve. Only the final plague, the death of the firstborn of Egypt (including his own son), persuades him reluctantly to free the Israelites—an action that he soon regrets, resulting in the Egyptians' disastrous pursuit of Israel and ultimate destruction in the waters of the Red Sea. In the end, God gives us what we ask for. He allows Pharaoh to suffer destruction along with Egypt in his pride and to insist on his right to torture and enslave a whole nation, pitting himself against the will of the Lord.

–Lavinia Spirito

DAY 31: Frogs, Gnats, and Flies

Reflect on the **Word**

At times, the Bible is like a flashlight that shines light on certain places in our lives. Other times, it is like a mirror and reflects us back to ourselves. Still other times, it is like sandpaper that smooths some of our rough edges.

- A healthy community can also be like a flashlight, mirror, or sandpaper.
- Today in Exodus, Moses tells Pharaoh that he can stop the plague of frogs whenever he says the word. Pharaoh responds, "Tomorrow" (Exodus 8:10). Here, Scripture acts like a mirror.
- Sometimes, when God tells us he can deliver us from something harmful or help us start something good, we respond, "Tomorrow."

  Many of us have a tendency to put things off until tomorrow, whether this is to start something good or get rid of something bad.

- Let us seek to have God's heart rather than Pharoah's.

  We cannot become like God without his help, so we need to pray for him to fill us with the Holy Spirit.

Exodus 8, Leviticus 6, Psalm 48

Take It to **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, we ask that you send your Holy Spirit, the Advocate, the Helper, the Comforter, the Convictor, the one who sustains and strengthens us, the one who is the presence of God living in our midst right now and in every moment. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

***How should Christians** read Leviticus, with all of its rituals and regulations?*

In Jesus' day, Leviticus was the first book a child would learn because it presents the central goal and call of the people of Israel—holiness. They were called by the Lord to be *holy*—that is, "set apart" from the world around them.

Leviticus, then, must be read within the context of the Exodus, particularly when the people rebel at the foot of Mount Sinai and build the golden calf (see Exodus 32). For many days, Moses has been on Sinai receiving instructions from the Lord, and Israel grows impatient with his absence, leading some to create an idol of gold to worship. When Moses returns, Israel is faced with a decision: follow those who created the golden calf or follow the Lord. It is the Levites who execute God's judgment and subsequently enjoy the distinction of being the priestly tribe.

At Mount Sinai, Israel experiences a kind of "boot camp" for the purpose of becoming God's influential firstborn son among the nations. Time after time, God calls on the Israelites to be holy as he is holy. God sets down laws that will distinguish them from Egypt and the other nations. The details of the Law will tell Israel how to eat, dress, and worship differently, in a way pleasing to the Lord.

–Lavinia Spirito

DAY 32: Cattle, Boils, and Hail

Reflect on the **Word**

When the Bible says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, this does not mean that God removed Pharaoh's free will or caused his heart to harden.

- God is like the sun. In the heat of the sun, wax melts but clay hardens. If our hearts are like wax, they will soften in God's presence, but if they are like clay, they will harden.
- As God reveals himself to Pharaoh, demonstrating his power and fighting for his people, Pharaoh's heart hardens.
- God never overwhelms our free will but always works with it.
- We need to ask ourselves where our hearts are becoming hardened in God's presence.

  We must always seek to have hearts that are like wax in response to God's will for our lives.
- Because this is difficult—actually impossible without God's grace—we need to pray for one another so that we might have hearts open to the Lord.

Exodus 9, Leviticus 7, Psalm 49

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise. We thank you for your Word. We thank you for speaking to us today and for sharing your heart with us. We continue to thank you for your willingness to fight, your willingness to wrestle, not just against us, Lord, not just with us, but to wrestle for us, to enter into our lives with your grace, with your goodness, and with your power. Lord, we ask that you please conquer us by your love, conquer us by your grace. Help us to surrender and to submit our minds and our hearts, our entire lives to your reign. You are the King. You are the God of everything. We give you praise in Jesus' name. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

***What does it mean** that God hardens Pharaoh's heart?*

In the book of Exodus, the phrase "hardened his heart" is used many times in relation to Pharaoh—at times we are told that God hardens Pharaoh's heart, and at other times Pharaoh hardens his own heart. The Hebrew word translated as "harden" here can mean "to make heavy." To have a heavy heart had special meaning for the ancient Egyptians, who depicted the final judgment of the dead as carried out by weighing a person's heart on a scale against a feather, which represented uprightness and truth. If someone's heart was found to be heavy, he or she would be condemned.

In Exodus, Pharaoh's heart is being weighed on the scales of justice and truth. Each time Pharaoh refuses to follow the Lord's commands regarding justice, his heart becomes heavier. God is "making" Pharaoh's heart heavy only in the sense that he gives a just command that Pharaoh refuses to obey. In the end, it is the heaviness of Pharaoh's heart that condemns him—because he is found wanting in his stubborn and prideful disobedience to God's command to free his people.

–Jeff Cavins

DAY 33: Locusts, Darkness, and Death of the Firstborn

Reflect on the **Word**

The ten plagues are associated with different Egyptian deities. In the plagues, God demonstrates that he is powerful above all these false gods.

- Through the plagues, God not only inflicts punishment on Pharoah for refusing to free his people from slavery and not only demonstrates his power over Egypt's false gods, but he is also seeking to reach the hearts of the Israelites.
- The Israelites have been enslaved in Egypt for four hundred years, so they have been affected by its culture and religious practices. Through the plagues, God is releasing his people from the influence of the Egyptian gods.

We need to worship God the way he wants, not the way we want. Jesus shows us how God wants us to worship at the Last Supper when he says, "Do this in remembrance of me" (see Luke 22:19).

- The book of Leviticus is so named because it contains instructions for the Levitical priesthood.

Before the golden calf idolatry, fathers are the priests of their families. We see this during the Passover when fathers lead their families in worship. After the golden calf, the priests of Israel will be from the tribe of Levi.

God wants to free us from our idolatry; he wants to dominate the things that dominate us so we are free to offer him proper worship.

Exodus 10–11, Leviticus 8, Psalm 50

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise and glory. You reveal that not only do you love us, you continually reveal your heart to us. You continually fight for us. You continually show to our hearts that we are made for you and you alone. Yet our hearts continually make idols, and we can make idols out of anything around us. Lord God, you free us from idols. You free us for true worship. Help our hearts to be free, truly free, that we do not turn to idols, that we do not turn to false worship, but that we have hearts that have the kind of interior freedom where we can offer you the worship that you ask for. We make this prayer in the mighty name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Reflect on the following question in your time of prayer today: *Do I worship God in the manner he has asked for, or do I worship him the way I want?*

Reflect on the **Word**

Some might find the death of the firstborn problematic. This plague must be placed in the context of Pharaoh's order for the death of the firstborn sons of Israel. God had warned Pharaoh that this would happen if he did not free the Israelites.

- The Passover lamb is a type (or, figure) of Jesus. At Jesus' baptism, St. John the Baptist proclaims, "Behold, the Lamb of God" (John 1:29). St. Paul proclaims him the Passover lamb. Jesus is the true Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.
- Just as the Israelites could not partake in the sacrifice of Passover until they had been brought into the covenant, we are not able to receive the Holy Eucharist until we have been brought into the New Covenant through Baptism.
- The Passover lamb has intrinsic value, but it becomes precious to each family as it is cared for. When the lamb is sacrificed at the end of the week, this truly is a sacrificial gift that means something to the family.
- When we participate in Mass, do we recognize the Lord's gift to us personally?
- The Israelites mark their doorposts and lintels with lamb's blood for several reasons: (1) God promises in Exodus 12 that he will see the blood and pass over those houses. (2) Since some sheep are considered sacred by the ancient Egyptians, the Israelites will have committed a sacrilege in their eyes and would find it difficult to remain there. (3) Ancient Egyptians inscribe their names on the doorposts of their homes; thus, the names of the Israelites on their homes will be marked by the blood of the lamb.
- As Christians, we have been saved by the blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus, and have been transformed by his sacrifice on the Cross.

Exodus 12, Leviticus 9, *Psalm 114*

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you thanks and praise. We thank you so much for your Word. We thank you for what you reveal to us about our lives in your covenant with the people of Israel. They are your chosen people. You are faithful to your covenant always. You have fulfilled your covenant, the covenant that you sealed with the Passover lamb—you fulfilled that in the New and Eternal Covenant with the blood of the true Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, your Son, Jesus Christ. That new and eternal covenant, the covenant of the Eucharist, the covenant that is established in the Mass, that we are brought into and that renews our reception into your family. Lord God, help us to always, always see your working in our lives and to always approach the Eucharist worthily, to always approach the Mass with hearts that are open and with hearts that have been made new by your grace. We make this prayer in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Each of us needs the freedom and love that Jesus gives us through the Holy Eucharist. Find some extra time during the week to participate in a weekday Mass and receive the Body and Blood of the Lord.

DAY 35: Crossing the Red Sea

Reflect on the **Word**

All the rules contained in Leviticus concern God's holiness—how "other" he is. To be holy means to be "set apart."

- When the sons of Aaron come into the Lord's presence and offer an unholy fire, the holy fire of God consumes them.
- In the New Covenant, God comes so close to us, and we become temples of the Holy Spirit.
- The Lord has revealed himself in poverty and humility by allowing people to reject, torture, and kill him. Because of this, we might forget God's holiness and present ourselves to him without proper reverence.

Especially in Leviticus, God reveals his holiness in an extreme way. This teaches us that we always need to approach him with seriousness.

- Do we participate in Mass and present ourselves to God in prayer in a way that shows we respect his holiness? Do we have a holy fear of the Lord?
- What would our lives look like if we took God seriously?
- In today's reading from Exodus, God tells the Israelites that he will fight for them; they only need to be still. He tells us the same thing.

Exodus 13–14, Leviticus 10, Psalm 53

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we thank you for your Word. We thank you for your commandments. We thank you for fighting for your people. Once again, you reveal to us in Exodus that you are willing. You not only see us, you not only know us, you not only know our plight, but you hear our pleas and you know our plight. You answer our prayers, and you answer by fighting for us. We praise you for that. We thank you for that. Every single day you fight for us, Lord God. You continue to give us your grace. You continue to make us whole again. You continue to call us closer and closer to your heart. Help us to always say yes to you. We ask this prayer through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, through the intercession of all the saints. We make this prayer in the mighty name of our God and Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

It can be easy to forget how holy—how "other"—God is. Spend some prayer time reflecting on the way you approach him. Do you always approach the Lord reverently?

DAY 36: Manna from Heaven

Reflect on the **Word**

Today in Exodus, the Israelites begin murmuring against God. After all he has done for them, they begin complaining that it would have been better if they had died as slaves in Egypt. They seem to be saying that it would have been better to die as people abandoned by the Lord rather than being led by him through dangerous and uncomfortable places.

- God is not just feeding and caring for his people; he is training them and asking something of them. He is trying to teach them who he is and that they can trust him.
- God sends manna for his people to eat. This lasts only a day before it spoils. On the sixth day of the week, they can gather twice as much so they can rest the next day on the Sabbath—a day of trust.

The Lord reveals his heart to Israel and shows them that he is always near to them.

- We also need to learn how to trust the Lord, which is why he has given us certain commandments. Some of the commandments keep us from harm, while others are to train us to be like him.

God is faithful to us—and he wants us to be faithful to him. For that, we need his grace.

- We cannot do this on our own. We need other people to pray for us and support us on the journey, in the "wilderness" of our lives.

Exodus 15–16, Leviticus 11, Psalm 71

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise. We thank you so much for your Word. We thank you for the gift of you revealing your heart to us through Scripture. We ask that you please let your Scripture, let your Word, let your grace conform our minds to your mind that we see things the way you see them. Conform our hearts to your heart so that we can love things as you love them. Help us to turn away from what kills us. Help us turn toward you, who give us life. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

We need holy community to pray for us and support us in our journey toward holiness. Take some time today to pray for or support members of your community.

Reflect on the **Word**

Some want to remove anything supernatural or miraculous from the stories of Scripture.

- When someone claims that a miracle has happened, the Church always seeks a natural explanation first. Only when all possible natural explanations have been eliminated can we conclude that something is a miracle.
- In the Old Testament stories we have read thus far—e.g., the parting of the Red Sea, the manna from heaven, the defeat of Amalek, the water from the rock at Meribah and Massah—we can safely eliminate any natural explanation. What we have left is God fighting for his people.
- Leviticus 12 speaks of a woman being "unclean" after giving birth. Here, "unclean" is not a moral judgment; it simply refers to being ritually unclean. Such a woman cannot approach the sanctuary until a prescribed period of time has passed.
- Typically, the things that can make a person unclean in the Old Testament concern the power of life and death.
- When a person comes in contact with an animal carcass (death), the person is considered unclean. When a person comes in contact with bodily fluids such as fluids associated with giving birth (life), he or she is considered unclean.

Exodus 17–18, Leviticus 12, Psalm 73

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we thank you. We thank you for your Word. We give you praise and glory. We ask that you please be with us right now and always. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Miraculous events are not limited to the days of the Bible—they still happen today! Spend some time learning about some Church-approved miracles. On the Ascension website, read the article "The Amazing Science of Recent Eucharistic Miracles: A Message from Heaven?" by Jeannette Williams.

DAY 38: The Ten Commandments

Reflect on the **Word**

Today in Exodus, God reveals himself to his people on Mount Sinai as he enters into a covenant with them.

- A *covenant* differs from a *contract*. A contract is an exchange of goods or services based on certain conditions, but a covenant is an exchange of persons; it establishes a binding relationship.
- Here in the Mosaic covenant, we see God expanding and deepening his covenant with Abraham. This covenant points the way to its fulfillment in the New and Eternal Covenant.
- In the New Covenant, Jesus gives himself—Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity—to us in the Eucharist, and we make a complete gift of ourselves to him when we receive.

  A husband and wife give themselves completely to each other in the covenant of marriage.
- After God makes his covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai, he gives them the Ten Commandments. If he had given his people commandments without a covenant, he would have given them rules without a relationship.
- God wants to show us who he is and have a relationship with us.
- His commandments give life to this relationship, so it can deepen, grow, and remain strong.

Exodus 19–20, Leviticus 13, Psalm 74

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we thank you. We give you praise for your Word. We thank you so much for revealing yourself to us, revealing your heart to us, and revealing your commandments to us here in the book of Exodus and in the book of Leviticus. Lord God, we know that you have called us by name, that you know us, and that you love us. We in response say that we also desire to know you. We also desire to love you more and more fully every single day. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

***Why do we** still follow the Ten Commandments but not the ritual laws of Leviticus?*

At Mount Sinai, Moses receives from God a codification of the foundational elements of the moral law. These laws are binding on all people of all times and places because they reflect the eternal law of God.

The ritual laws found in Leviticus, however, are given to the Israelites to set them apart from other nations and keep them from assimilating the practices of pagan religions. During their four-hundred-year stay in Egypt, the people of Israel were influenced by the beliefs and rituals of Egyptian culture. As they enter and conquer the Promised Land, Israel will be exposed to the practices of the Canaanites.

The complex and detailed worship laws of Leviticus teach the people of Israel that they belong to God—and that they are called to be an example to the nations of a holy people dedicated to the Lord. The sacrificial system of the Old Testament is fulfilled and superseded by the perfect sacrifice of Jesus, the Lamb of God, on the Cross, which atones for sins. This is why Christians are not bound to follow the ritual laws of Leviticus.

–Lavinia Spirito

DAY 39: Slavery in the Old Testament

Reflect on the **Word**

Today in Exodus, the Lord instructs the Israelites what they are to do with slaves.

- In the ancient Egyptian and Greco-Roman world, "gods" and "goddesses" were not seen as good, merely as powerful.
- The Lord teaches the Israelites that he is a God of justice who hears their cry. He shows them that their actions cannot be rooted in power, vengeance, or utility but must be rooted in justice.
- Here, God is speaking to a community that does not yet know there are restrictions on what can and cannot be done to other people. Slavery is seen as normal to them because they themselves were in slavery for four hundred years.

  God has to start somewhere. He has to come down to their level. They do not yet know that human beings have been created in his image and likeness. They have to be taught how to treat other people with justice.

  Eventually, God begins to call his people to choose mercy over justice—but they first must learn what justice is.
- God starts with setting parameters on how the Israelites can treat their slaves. He teaches them that they are not allowed to do whatever they want with them—that slaves are not truly their property.

Exodus 21, Leviticus 14, Psalm 75

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise and thank you. We thank you for your Word. We thank you for convicting us and for challenging us with how you reveal yourself to us. You reveal yourself to us so slowly and incrementally. Lord, you meet us where we are at. You stoop down to us, not to leave us there, but to raise us up to you. Help us to recognize your divine condescension, your gentle and helpful condescension meeting us in our brokenness, meeting us in our woundedness, and beginning where we are so that we can end up where you are. Thank you. We make this prayer and ask you to please receive our thanks in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

***Why is slavery** permitted in the Bible? Isn't slavery morally wrong?*

When we read the Bible, we always need to pay close attention to the culture in which it was written.

Nearly every example of slavery in the Old Testament is "debt slavery" (similar to what was called "indentured servitude" in more recent times), where a person would serve another to satisfy debts. In biblical times, being a "bondservant" often kept a person from absolute destitution or even death. The laws regarding servitude in the Old Testament, then, were established so that the people of Israel would protect the lives and dignity of their slaves.

In the New Testament, passages pertaining to slavery are addressed to Christians living in the Roman Empire, where slavery was the norm. St. Paul tells Christian slaves to serve with a faithful heart as an act of obedience to God. He then tells "masters" to treat their servants fairly and justly, always keeping in mind that all Christians have the same master—Jesus Christ.

–Jeff Cavins

DAY 40: Laws of Justice

Reflect on the **Word**

Exodus 22 speaks about social and religious laws regarding restitution. These laws of restitution are principles according to justice rather than vengeance.

- Our hearts are inclined to vengeance, but justice limits it. This reveals the heart of God, who says that he is justice itself.
- These laws teach us that we have to pursue justice more than vengeance if we want to live in harmony with one another and have a real community.
- Leviticus 15 speaks of bodily emissions. There are rules about these emissions because the body is sacred, and some of these particular emissions refer to life and relationships.

  Though we are no longer bound by the ritual laws of the Old Covenant, we still need to treat these things with respect.
- In these rules, God shows his just heart. He reveals that he is a just God who seeks to form a just people. Sacred things must be treated as sacred.

Exodus 22, Leviticus 15, Psalm 76

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you thanks. Thank you so much for your Word. Thank you for sharing with us your heart. Even in your law, which can seem so distant to us—can seem so dry, so otherworldly, and even so confusing—we thank you because it reveals your heart. We ask that you please continue to reveal your heart to us as we reveal our hearts to you. You are the Lord, and we are yours. Help us to be yours more and more every day. We make this prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Justice demands that sacred things be treated as sacred. In prayer, dwell on the justice of God and how it relates to each aspect of your life: family, work or school, friendships, parish community, and beyond.

DAY 41: The Day of Atonement

Reflect on the **Word**

In Exodus 23, the Israelites are commanded to be both just and fair in their dealings with the poor. As Christians, we are called to serve the poor but never in a manner in which we commit injustice on their behalf.

- God's laws are about justice and restitution but also about harmonious living.
- God recognizes both the hardness and softness of the Israelites' hearts. Hardness might motivate them to get away with whatever they can against the poor, but softness might lead them into evil for the sake of the oppressed.
- Three major worship festivals of Israel are Passover, Pentecost (the feast of the harvest, about fifty days after Passover), and the Feast of Tabernacles. A fourth festival, Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), is a day of fasting when the people remember their sins and ask the Lord for forgiveness.

  The high priest takes the goat—the "scapegoat"—and places his hands over its head as he declares the sins of the Israelites. The goat then carries away the sins of the people and is sent into the wilderness to die.

  The Israelites' forms of worship prepare us for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Jesus is the Lamb of God sent to die, carrying the sins of the people. In the Eucharist, the priest offers the great sacrifice of the Lamb of God to the Father on behalf of the people.

  Whenever a particular story seems irrelevant, remember that everything in the Old Testament is setting the stage to be fulfilled in Christ.

Exodus 23, Leviticus 16, Psalm 77

Take It to **Prayer**

Heavenly Father, you are good, and you do lead us. We thank you for your Word; we thank you for calling us your own. Thank you for making us your own. Thank you for giving yourself to us that we can not only know who you are, infinite in your might and infinite in your goodness and in your love, but also so that we can know who we are—so that we can also know not only your rule, but can also be in a deep relationship with you. So today we call upon the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God. In his name, Father in heaven, we thank you. In the name of Jesus Christ we praise you. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask you to continue to be with us now and always. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Ponder the words spoken to the Israelites today about how they interact with the poor. Pray for the poor today and ask the Lord how you can better serve the poor you encounter in your life.

DAY 42: Moral Laws

Reflect on the **Word**

Moses places half of the blood of his animal sacrifice on the altar, and he sprinkles the other half on the people, as they proclaim, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do" (Exodus 24:7). We see this mirrored when an adult publicly professes his or her belief in the Catholic Faith through RCIA.

- This exchange between God and his people is similar to the exchange of matrimonial vows, when the man and woman each offer themselves to each other.
- When we hear Moses say, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words" (Exodus 24:8), we hear the echo of what we pray at every Mass before receiving the Eucharist ourselves. This confirms our own place in the covenant.

The Old Testament is not obsolete. We need to understand the Old Testament to truly appreciate the New.

- There are three kinds of law in the Old Testament: laws that govern society, particularly the kingdom of Israel; laws regarding proper worship; and laws regarding morality.
- Since neither the kingdom of Israel (as constituted in the Old Testament) nor the Temple exist any longer, the first two types of laws are no longer necessary. The moral law, however, retains its force.

For example, how do we know that laws on sexual morality did not pass away along with those pertaining to Israel and Temple worship? In Leviticus 18:24, the Lord clearly states that other nations had "defiled themselves" with sexual immorality. So the moral law binds all human beings, not just the Chosen People.

- God gives us his commandments not to condemn us but to show us that we are his beloved.

Exodus 24, Leviticus 17–18, Psalm 78

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we thank you for your Word. We thank you for this great prayer that reminds us of all that you have done in our lives. Lord God, one of the big temptations we all have is to forget what you have done. To forget your might. To forget your goodness. To forget your love for us. To forget that you have fought for us. In so many ways and so many times you remind us that the Lord will fight for us. All we have to do is keep still. Lord God, this Psalm 78 reminds us of the need for us to remember how good you are and to remember how fickle we can be. Lord God, please help us if we have been false to you. Help us to be true to you now. If we have strayed, please find us and bring us back to your heart. If we have run away from you, we give you permission right now to take hold of our hands, to take hold of our hearts, and bring us back to you. Bring us back home. Bring us back to you who are good—who fight for us, who love us. Lord God, we make this prayer in the mighty name of Jesus Christ, your Son. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Take some time today to think about your journey through Scripture so far. Have there been any Old Testament stories that helped you to understand Jesus and the Church better? If so, let that be your inspiration as you continue through the Old Testament!

DAY 43: The Ark of the Covenant

Reflect on the **Word**

The Holy of Holies is behind a thick curtain, or "veil." This is where the Ark of the Covenant dwells.

- There are powerful connections between the Tabernacle and the Catholic liturgical practices.
- The mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant symbolizes God's mercy for his people.

At Jesus' death on the Cross, the veil of the Temple is torn in two.

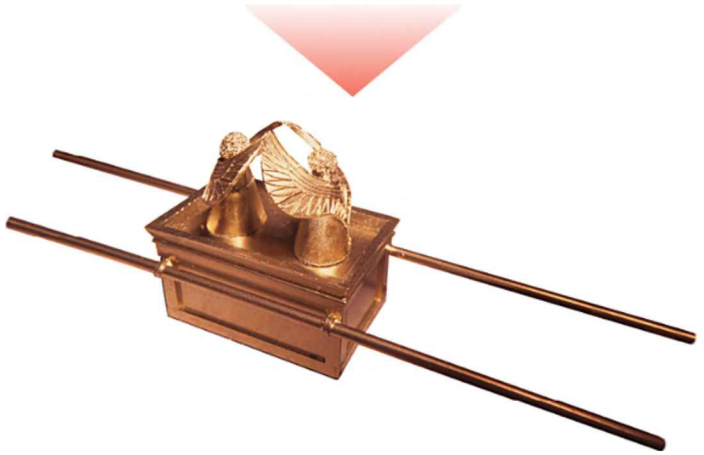
- Just as the veil in the Temple sanctuary is torn, the body of Jesus is "torn" when his side is pierced by the spear of the Roman soldier. We read that blood and water flow out of his pierced side, symbolizing the Holy Eucharist and Baptism.
- The Holy of Holies is revealed in that moment because God's revelation—and salvation—is now open to the entire world through the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross.
- Exodus 25:30 says, "You shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before me always." The tabernacle of every Catholic church throughout the world contains the true "bread of presence" in the Holy Eucharist.
- As we have seen, the book of Leviticus, with all of its ritual laws, shows the people of Israel how to live their true identity as God's people.

Exodus 25–26, Leviticus 19, *Psalm 119:1-56*

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise. We give you thanks right now. Lord God, we praise you not only for your future deliverance for us. We also praise you for what you have done for us in the past. We praise you for all the good that you have brought into our lives—the fact that you have made us into your children through the gift of your Holy Spirit given to us at Baptism. We thank you for the gift of worship. We thank you for revealing your heart to us and how we are to approach you, Lord God. Without revealing how we are to approach you, we would be lost. We would have no idea how you desire us to come to you. We would have no idea how you desire us to live truly in freedom and in holiness. You are holy, you call us to be holy, and you make it possible by your grace for us to be holy. Help us to choose holiness today. Help us to choose you today. Help us to glorify you today. We make this prayer in the mighty name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**



ARK OF THE COVENANT

This model of the Ark of the Covenant shows the two long staves that were placed through rings to carry it. The pure gold lid of the Ark, or mercy seat, had two cherubim crafted out of it. (See Exodus 25, 37.)

DAY 44: Priestly Garments

Reflect on the **Word**

Every priest is from the tribe of Levi, so one must be born a priest in the Old Testament.

- The beautiful priestly garments are not intended to glorify Aaron or his sons—that is, the priests—but God.
- Likewise, priestly vestments in the Church are meant to reflect the beauty of God himself and the sacredness of the liturgy.
- As in the Levitical priesthood, liturgical vestments diminish a priest's individuality and highlight the uniqueness of Jesus Christ—the great High Priest who lives forever. Vestments are intended to show that every priest is representing something greater than himself.

Whenever a Levitical priest approaches the Lord, he is not approaching only as himself but as a representative of the entire people of Israel.

- In the Old Testament, every priest carries engraved stones over his heart for the twelve tribes of Israel. The Israelites are over his heart, revealing to us the true call of the priest.
- To be a priest is to be a father who carries the names of his sons and daughters in his heart as he approaches the Lord. This is the heart of both the priesthood and fatherhood.

The priests of your parish approach the Lord with your name engraved on their hearts.

Exodus 27–28, Leviticus 20, *Psalm 119:57-120*

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise, and we thank you for your Word. We thank you for this prayer of Psalm 119 because what you do, Lord God, is this psalmist is us. On one hand we say, "I am faithful to you, and you are good." On the other hand it is like, "Lord, please, time is running out." Lord God, thank you. Help us to trust you even when we are at our wits' end. Help us to let you shape and form us. Help us give you permission to love us as you know we need to be loved. Help us to do that, Lord God. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

GARMENTS OF THE HIGH PRIEST

On the high priest's head covering was a golden plate inscribed "Holy to the Lord." A colorful vest had the breastpiece of judgment with twelve precious stones. On the shoulders were two onyx stones engraved with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. (See Exodus 28.)

DAY 45: Pray for Priests

Reflect on the **Word**

The priests of the New Covenant are ordained to lead the people in worship. They are called to be intercessors.

- Priests are called to be holy and live in a certain way.
- While we have heard of the grave sins of some priests, every priest—like every disciple of Christ—fails in many small ways to honor the Lord.
- At times, every Christian fails to live up to the call to be holy as the Lord God is holy.
- Today, let us pray intentionally for priests, that they might lead holy lives and be faithful to the call of Jesus. Let us pray that they will be men after God's own heart.

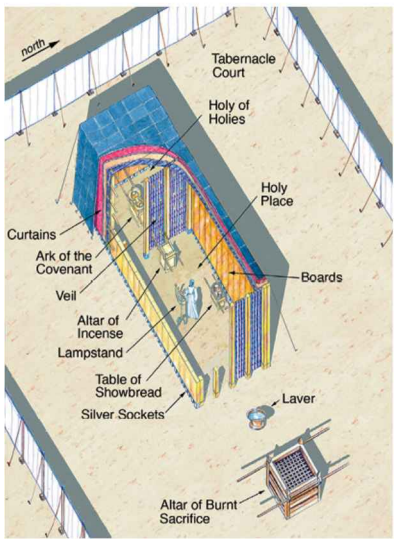
  We all go astray in many ways, and we often do not know the way home. But, as the psalmist says, we can tell God that we have gone astray and ask him to seek us out.
- Pray that you may be sought and brought home by the Lord who loves you.

Exodus 29, Leviticus 21, *Psalm 119:121-176*

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise, and we thank you. Thank you so much for your Word. Thank you so much for the gift of the priesthood that you have given not only to the people of Israel, but to the new and eternal priest—the priesthood of Jesus Christ, your Son, that you have given to your people—the priest that you have given to the Church as it exists now and as it exists from its founding when your Son offered himself for us at the Last Supper and said, "Take this all of you, and eat of it. This is my body. Take this all of you, and drink from it. This is the cup of my blood, the cup of the New and Eternal Covenant." Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you so much. Thank you that you are the great High Priest. We thank you that you have chosen men among us to extend that work, to share in the mission, to share in the identity, and to share in the ministry of your priesthood. Help us all to draw near to you, as those who are baptized are also made "kingdom priests" by our Baptism. Help us all to lift up our voices, lift up our hearts, and lift up the great sacrifice to the Father in your name, by the power of your Holy Spirit. We make this prayer in your mighty name, Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**



THE TABERNACLE

The Tabernacle stood at the back of a court formed by dozens of pillars with linen curtains. Inside the holy place was the table of showbread (or "the bread of the Presence"). (See Exodus 25–27.)

DAY 46: Set Apart for God

Reflect on the **Word**

The book of Leviticus is not just about rules; it is about *holiness*—being "set apart" and consecrated to the Lord.

- As Catholics, when we bless things, we are setting them apart for a dedicated purpose. They go from being ordinary to "extra-ordinary."
- Regarding the priesthood, St. Pius X said, "Sanctity alone makes us what our divine vocation demands, men crucified to the world and to whom the world has been crucified, men walking in the newness of life … who seek only heavenly things and strive by every means to lead others to them."*
- As St. Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). The ministerial priesthood, then, is blessed and set apart.
- Every baptized Christian shares in the common priesthood of the faithful—and is called to live a holy and consecrated life.

In Exodus 31, Bezalel and Oholiab are skilled craftsmen, but more importantly, they are filled with the Spirit of God.

- We too can seek to be filled with the Holy Spirit as we go about our work. If we invite God into our labors, an ordinary day can become extraordinary.
- The most secular work can be transformed into sacred work by those who have been set apart by the Spirit of God.

Exodus 30–31, Leviticus 22, *Psalm 115*

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we do give you praise right now and forevermore, as you continue to reveal your heart to us, as you continue to recall us to give you our hearts and you make those hearts holy—because you are the Lord, and you are the one who makes us holy. You are the one who is the source of all goodness. Every time we come into contact with you, we come into contact with true goodness. Help us, Lord, today to hear your Word and to allow that Word to transform our minds, to transform our hearts, and to transform the way that we see this world. We make this in the mighty name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

***What happened** to Moses' children?*

In the time of Moses, family structure was patriarchal—families were led and protected by fathers. As a result, it is reasonable to assume that Moses' sons, as heads of their families, would continue as leaders of Israel after Moses' passing. But we do not hear much about his children after the Exodus.

At some point after Moses was called to lead the people out of Egypt, his wife Zipporah was sent away, and she went with their sons, Gershom and Eliezer, to live with her father, Jethro, in Midian. At Mount Sinai, Moses' wife and sons were reunited with him. (See Exodus 18:1-5.) Later, the sons of Gershom and Eliezer are named in 1 Chronicles 23:16-17.

Gershom and Eliezer were from the tribe of Levi, so they would have been called to assist in Tabernacle worship. (See 1 Chronicles 23:14.) While Moses' sons did not follow their father in leading Israel, Aaron's sons did carry on the traditions of their father and uncle. The Bible seems to consider the sons of Aaron as sons of Moses, as reflected in Numbers 3:1 where the verse begins, "These are the generations of Aaron and Moses …" but then goes on to list only the four sons of Aaron.

–Jeff Cavins

DAY 47: The Golden Calf

Reflect on the **Word**

As Moses receives the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, in the camp the people become restless and uncertain. This leads some to fashion a golden calf to worship.

- God invites us to walk in faith in the midst of uncertainty, yet we often grow tired of waiting and try to take matters into our own hands.
- The Israelites ascribe the role of God to an idol, the golden calf.
- We too can turn to idols, turning things that are good into "ultimate" things to feel like we are in control. We make these things our "god."
- How often do we create a "new version" of God that we can take out when we need him and put away when we are done with him?
- We all have broken hearts that God is trying to reach. As the Israelites journey through the wilderness, the Lord is training his people to let go of seeking to control and instead to trust him.

The world is uncertain and so are our lives. When we are tempted to put our faith in things we can control, God says, "You can't control me, but you don't have to because I love you."

Exodus 32, Leviticus 23, Psalm 79

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we thank you for your Word. We thank you for this prayer. We thank you for revealing to us the brokenness of our own hearts when we hear the story of the Exodus and the story of the golden calf. We know, Lord God, that our hearts are idol-making machines. We can turn to anything instead of turning to you. Help us always, always to be faithful to you, not just in great things but also in small things. Lord God, we want to belong to you. We want to be yours. Help us to be yours fully. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

What does it mean *that Moses convinced God to "repent of the evil" (see Exodus 32:14)?*

Here, Moses projects onto God human feelings of anger and frustration to illustrate the enormity of Israel's sin in worshipping the golden calf. By human standards, the Lord would be justified in wiping out the Israelites and starting over. But God is faithful, even when his people are not. In this incident, we see the crucial importance of intercessory prayer. Through the ingenious device of "reminding" God, Moses recounts all the things the Lord has done for his people, of his covenant with Abraham and the miraculous events of the Exodus.

God certainly has not forgotten, but Moses uses these points as a springboard to ask for mercy. God does not repent of anything because he is perfect; he allows things so his mercy and grace can be more fully revealed. When Adam and Eve reject his perfect plan in the Garden, he offers them the hope of a coming Messiah. When his original plan of the priesthood of fathers in Israel is rejected through the golden calf, he remedies the sin through the priests of Levi.

–Lavinia Spirito

DAY 48: God's Presence

Reflect on the **Word**

Moses stands before God interceding for the people, prefiguring Jesus in his mediation.

- The Bible makes it clear that the people of Israel are not unique because of their own goodness or giftedness above other nations. They are the Chosen People because God entered into a covenant with them.
- Moses says that if God does not continue to be with them—the one thing that makes them distinct—they will become extinct.
- That is also what makes the people of God in the New Covenant distinct—his presence dwelling with us through the Holy Spirit.

Since God is present with us, the Ten Commandments show us how we are to live differently. We are often tempted to live like the world. But we are called to be holy—set apart—and live as God wants us to live, for our sake and those around us.

God not only dwells in the tabernacle, he dwells within us in the Holy Spirit. Every baptized person is a temple of the Holy Spirit. Because of the indwelling Spirit, every Christian is being made distinct due to the presence of God within.

We need to ask ourselves if we are living distinctly. Part of that distinctive living is listening to God's Word and letting it shape our attitudes and our actions.

Exodus 33–34, Leviticus 24, Psalm 80

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we know that you are good and that you are faithful, that when we turn to you, you are already there. You are the one who actually helps us turn to you. Lord God, even the very fact that we are able to listen to your Word is your gift. The very fact that we want to listen to your Word is itself your gift. Lord God, we find every time we turn our hearts to you, our minds to you, our eyes to you, you are already there. That every one of our prayers is a response to you—every one of our prayers is a response to your love that already exists, every one of our prayers is a response to your grace that is already given. Lord God, we ask you, please do not abandon us. Please never abandon us, for without you we would fail. We would fail not only to live, we would fail to exist. So we trust you with all of our hearts and all of our lives. We give you praise today, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

***Did Moses** see God's face or not? It seems like Exodus 33:11 and 33:20 are saying different things.*

The desire of Moses' heart was to "see" God—that is, to have an intimate relationship with the Lord (see Exodus 33:13). There is a difference between Moses' personal interaction with God in the pillar of cloud and his request to see the Lord's glory. Though Moses saw more of God's glory than any other human, his experience remained limited.

The "glory of the Lord" is synonymous with the very presence of Almighty God. Here, we learn an important principle: God is entirely other; he is transcendent; his ways are not our ways. In heaven, even the seraphim—the highest order of angels closest to the divine throne—hide their faces before him (see Isaiah 6:2). Even Moses' limited vision of God so transformed him that his face shone with the reflected glory of the Lord.

–Lavinia Spirito

DAY 49: The Year of Jubilee

Reflect on the **Word**

We need to worship God in the manner he has commanded rather than inventing our own form of worship.

- The sacrifice of the Mass offered by the priests of the Church fulfills the sacrifices of the Old Testament priests. It is the new and eternal sacrifice of Christ's Body and Blood, which the Lord commanded his apostles to do in memory of him.
- The worship that God instructs us to offer is intended to shape our entire lives. The Mass cannot simply be an hour of our lives once a week. It must be at the very heart of our lives.
- The heart of worship is sacrifice, and the heart of religion is worship. Our worship is sacrifice—a sacrificial offering of love.
- Here in Leviticus, we read about the "sabbatical year," when the Lord commands his people to rest from planting and harvesting. This occurs every seventh year, similar to the sabbath rest on the seventh day.
- Today, we live in a culture of workaholism and consumerism, yet God commands us to rest from our labors.

  Rest affirms that we are no longer slaves but trusting sons and daughters of God.
- The year of Jubilee is a year of restoration, when debts are forgiven, property is restored, and slaves are freed. God is teaching his people that they are not meant to be slaves.

Exodus 35–36, Leviticus 25, Psalm 81

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise. We thank you so much for your Word. We thank you for confounding us. We thank you for confusing us. Lord God, when we hear about slavery, when we hear about these things that have been such a scourge on humanity for so many years, we just ask that you enlighten our minds to be able to understand what is the reason that you allowed for this to take place. What is it that you're teaching us in doing this and allowing this to be a part of the life of the people of Israel, your people? Lord God, help us to not harden our hearts nor tell our minds to be darkened. But open our hearts and open our minds to not be minds of cynicism or skepticism, to not be hearts of distrust. Open our hearts to trusting you. We make this prayer in Jesus' name. Amen

Dive **Deeper**

Dwell on what it means to be holy, or "set apart" for God. Are there areas of your life that are not living up to this call? If so, invite God into those areas and ask him to transform them.

DAY 50: Sacrificial Offerings

Reflect on the **Word**

While grain and burnt offerings are necessary, the Lord asks his people for offerings from generous hearts. Worship has ritual elements that must be followed, but it also needs to be offered from the heart.

- The people of Israel are moved so deeply and fully in their generosity that God tells them to stop sacrificing.

We are called to allow the Lord to move our hearts to generosity and to supply for the needs of people locally and around the world.

- Imagine being so generous with our time, talent, and treasure that we would reach a point where we would have to stop giving!
- Love requires sacrifice, and this is what we are called to offer the Lord.
- God makes it clear that there are consequences for our actions. He says he will hand the people of Israel over to the sword due to their disobedience—not because he hates them but because he loves them and wants them to repent.
- In other words, the Lord says, "If this still won't call you back to my heart, then I'll let the next thing happen to you." The point here is not punishment but rescue. It is the discipline of a loving father for his rebellious children.
- When we approach the Bible without trusting God, we see only harsh punishments. But when we approach it with a spirit of trust, we see that God is always good and loving, even when he disciplines his people.

Exodus 37–38, Leviticus 26, Psalm 82

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we thank you for sharing your heart with us. We thank you so much for your commandments. We thank you for revealing to us your heart and how we are called to offer you our heart. Thank you for sharing your Word with us today. We ask you to please be with us in all of our moments. In our moments of darkness and our moments of light, moments we turn away from you and in moments when we find ourselves deep, deep in your most Sacred Heart. We make this prayer, Father, in the name of your only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

The Israelites were not perfect, but we see the beauty of their generosity in action. Today, identify a way that you could give more generously of your time, talent, or resources.

DAY 51: Israel's Worship of God

Reflect on the **Word**

In both the Old and New Covenants, God shapes his people through worship.

- Since we have been created in God's image and likeness and have been consecrated to him through Baptism, we are called to worship him truly and fully.
- The precious objects the people have assembled are ordinary until they are made holy by God's anointing.
- Though we are fearfully and wonderfully made, we too are ordinary at our births and are made extraordinary by being consecrated to God.
- Whenever the cloud rises above the Tabernacle, the Israelites move forward. If the cloud remains, then they wait. Likewise, we are called to wait on the Lord, moving when he calls us to move and staying when he calls us to stay.
- Something that has been dedicated to God cannot be taken back.

  Sometimes, the Lord asks us for a sacrifice; other times, we give him something because he has moved our hearts.

Exodus 39–40, Leviticus 27, Psalm 83

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, thank you so much. Thank you for your Word. Thank you for leading us on this journey. Thank you for sharing your heart with us, because you enlighten us with your Word. You shape our minds, our hearts; you fill them with your goodness when we open ourselves to you. So we ask you to please help us to trust in you. Help us to continue to be open to you. Help us to have inquisitive minds, but not skeptical minds. Help us to have hearts that are wise, but not hearts that are cynical. Lord God, we trust in you and we love you and we thank you. Please receive our thanks this day. Receive our thanks through the mighty name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Find a church or adoration chapel near you and worship God present in the Eucharist.

REVIEW: Egypt and Exodus

Egypt and Exodus **Recap**

After a three-month journey to Mount Sinai, Israel went through a spiritual makeover as God put in place a plan to bring his people's attention back to him. Once they were out of bondage, God led them through Moses to a place where they would have to rely upon him. Idolatry would continue to be a problem, but Israel slowly came to understand the heart of the Lord.

Egypt and Exodus **Review Questions**

Use these questions to test your knowledge of the time period you just finished. Answers are below. No matter how many you can answer, celebrate the accomplishment of finishing another period!

1. How old was Moses when he fled into the desert after killing an Egyptian?
2. When Moses asked God his name, how did God respond?
3. Who accompanied Moses when he faced Pharaoh?
4. After the Exodus, what tribe became the priests?
5. What was the name of the food the Lord gave his people in the desert?
6. What was placed in the Holy of Holies?
7. When Moses came down from the mountain, he found the people partying and worshipping an idol. What forbidden image did Aaron assist the people in making?

1. Forty years old
2. God answered, "I AM WHO I AM."
3. His brother Aaron
4. The tribe of Levi
5. Manna
6. The Ark of the Covenant
7. A golden calf

Tan is the color of the **DESERT WANDERINGS** time period because it is the color of the desert.

Key **Events & Figures**

The period of the Desert Wanderings begins while Israel is still camped at Mount Sinai. They will spend a year there before breaking camp and making their way north to the Promised Land. At Kadesh Barnea, they send spies, one from every tribe, into the land of Canaan to see if they can conquer the Canaanites. The vote comes back ten to two against trying.

The Lord responds that if they do not trust him, they can live with the consequences. For every day they spied out the land, they will wander in the wilderness for a year. Again, they learn the hard way!

The main figure in the Desert Wanderings period is Moses. Aaron, Moses' brother, plays a significant role as well. Miriam, Moses' sister, and the Levites all play significant roles in this period.

What **Changes?**

The more things change, the more things stay the same. The number forty is important in the Bible, as it represents trials, difficulties, and testing. It rained for forty days after Noah built the Ark. Moses was on Mount Sinai for forty days, and now Israel will experience their testing for forty years in the wilderness.

The greatest change takes place in daily living. In obedience to the Law of God, Israel adopts new food, clothing, worship, and legal processes to set them apart from the practices of Egypt and the other nations. It is these new ways of living that set them free from bondage. Israel's obedient change of heart results in an ever-deepening freedom.

DAY 52: Israel Continues to Journey

Reflect on the **Word**

From the census in the wilderness in Numbers, we see that an estimated two million people are traveling with Moses at this point.

- The Tabernacle is placed at the center of the camp, and the Levites live closest to it.
- God's presence, then, lies at the heart of his people.
- At the time of the census, approximately a year has passed since the people have been delivered from slavery in Egypt. The book of Deuteronomy takes place forty years later.
- In the beginning of Deuteronomy, Moses recaps the events of Numbers. We get a recap of the first things that happened when God led his people from slavery and into freedom at Mount Sinai.

Moses reminds the Israelites of the Law because their parents were not faithful to it.

- God gives the Law as a mercy, knowing that people's hearts are fickle and often unfaithful.
- When he gives us his law and we fail, God wants us to recognize that we have failed and need to repent and return to him.

Numbers 1, Deuteronomy 1, Psalm 84

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we glory in you, and we praise you. We ask you right now to accept our thanksgiving, to accept our praise. Lord God, what we are going to hear in the next couple of days is that when Israel travels, the tribe of Judah leads the way. The tribe of Judah goes up first. Judah means "praise," Lord God. So we give you our praise now. We give you praise for Scripture that we don't understand, Scripture that we might find uninspiring. We give you praise for the mystery that is you. And you reveal yourself to us in so many varied ways—so often in hazy ways. But you have revealed your heart to us truly in your Son. It is in his name, Lord God, that we ask that you please receive our thanks. Receive our thanks for the ability to continue walking with you. Receive our thanks for our forefathers and foremothers in the Faith, the Jewish people, the people of Israel—your faithfulness to them in spite of them being unfaithful to you, because your faithfulness to them in the midst of their unfaithfulness gives us the certainty that you will remain faithful even when we are unfaithful. So we thank you, God. We praise you. Please receive our thanks and praise in Jesus' name. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

We can easily become discouraged and hide from God when we fail, as Adam and Eve did after their sin in the Garden of Eden. Take today's readings to prayer and ponder how God always wants us to come back to him after our failures.

Reflect on the **Word**

As we have seen, the Tabernacle was the center of the Israelites' camp, with the Levites camped around it. The remaining twelve tribes were located to the east, west, north, and south, just beyond the Levites.

- At the beginning of his Gospel, Matthew presents a genealogy that runs from Abraham to Joseph to Jesus. The list of names is from the tribe of Judah.
- Judah was the fourth of Jacob's sons, yet he was selected to receive the birthright blessing. The entire world would be blessed through the tribe of Judah with the coming of Jesus.
- Judah is on the eastern side, next to the Tabernacle, and Judah is the first tribe to march into battle. The name Judah means "praise," and this signifies that the tribe of Judah's praise is sent before the people.
- The arrangement of the Israelites' camp shows that God favors order. He brings order to a people who have just been released from slavery and lack order.
- Moses tells the people not to attack the Edomites or Ammonites because they are relatives of the Israelites and are occupying land that God gave to them.

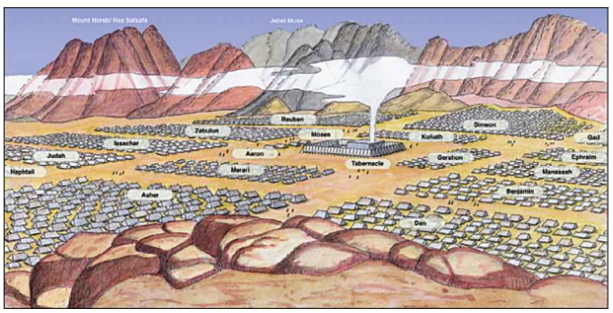
  In his faithfulness, God has a specific land set aside for Israel.
- Today, let your praise go up first, and center God in the midst of your life like the Israelites' formation around the Tabernacle in their camp.

Numbers 2, Deuteronomy 2, Psalm 85

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we thank you. We thank you for your Word. We thank you for trusting us and entrusting your Word to us. We thank you for sharing who you are. We thank you for sharing that you are faithful to your promises, that you are faithful to your people. And we thank you for giving us the opportunity today to come into contact with you through the power of your Word proclaimed. And we thank you in the midst of confusion. We thank you in the midst of not being inspired. We thank you. Or we thank you in the midst of clarity and in the midst of being illuminated and inspired and moved forward by your grace and your Spirit. Because, Lord God, whenever your Word is proclaimed, whenever it is read or heard, we know that you are present. And we know that you are telling us something, you are revealing something of your heart to us. And you are revealing something of our hearts to ourselves. So, Lord God, where there is confusion, give us clarity. Where there is dullness, give us inspiration. Where there is a lack of zeal, give us a great joy and a love for you this day and every day, Lord God. We ask this of you in the mighty name of your son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**



CAMP OF ISRAEL

This drawing shows the encampment of the Israelites at the foot of Mount Horeb. In the center stands the Tabernacle with a pillar of cloud resting over it. (See Numbers 2, 4; Exodus 40:34-38.)

Reflect on the **Word**

The tribe of Levi is set apart from the other tribes when the Levites rise up against those Israelites who have worshipped the golden calf.

- While the entire tribe of Levi is set apart for service in the Tabernacle, not every Levite is a priest.
- The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh are given land in what is called Transjordan—that is, on the other side of the Jordan River.
- The Lord tells these tribes that this land will be theirs when they have helped the rest of Israel enter and obtain the Promised Land. So they have been given a home they cannot yet settle.
- Moses recounts how he begged the Lord to see the land beyond the Jordan, but since he struck the rock twice when asked not to, the Lord is angry with him and does not allow him to enter the Promised Land.
- God loves Moses, and he is a faithful man. But as leader of Israel, he is held to a higher standard.

  Moses is allowed to go to the top of Mount Pisgah to see the Promised Land, but he will die without entering it.
- God always answers our prayers, but sometimes the answer is no. In refusing to answer our prayers in the way we want, God is always faithful and loving. He still loves Moses—and he loves us and knows what is best for us.

Numbers 3, Deuteronomy 3, Psalm 87

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise, and we thank you. Even in the midst of the depths, even in the midst of darkness, you are faithful. And we can trust in you. Amen, amen. We make this prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Sometimes, God's answer to our prayers is no. Think of a time in your life when God's answer to your prayer was no. Ask him to show you how he was working in that situation.

Reflect on the **Word**

Psalm 88 is the only psalm that ends in darkness, while every other psalm ends in hope, even in the midst of pain and discouragement.

- The Levites are instructed to carry the sacred objects from the Tabernacle. These objects are so holy that the Levites are called to carry them with poles to keep from touching them. Only the priests can approach these holy things.
- All of the Levites have particular jobs to do, and God appoints each family to their tasks of service accordingly. As St. Paul says, there is one body but many parts (see 1 Corinthians 12:12).
- Similarly, God knows each of us and appoints us each to some definite task. As St. John Henry Newman says, "God has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission—I never may know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next."** I know that God has made me on purpose, and because of that I can lift up my head, because of that I can live with purpose because my life matters.
- Just before Moses gives the Ten Commandments to the people of Israel, he tells the people that the Lord forbids them from making any graven images as their ancestors did.

  The Lord knows that the people want to turn to idol worship, but they must uproot the desire from their hearts.
- God wants to be our God, so we cannot turn to any false "gods."

Numbers 4, Deuteronomy 4, Psalm 88

Take It to **Prayer**

Father, we hear this prayer. We make this prayer of Psalm 88, and we know that you are near us in darkness. You are near us when we are alone and lonely and isolated. This is your prayer that you have placed into our mouths—this psalm, this prayer that was prayed by Jesus himself when he was abandoned by his friends in the custody of Caiaphas, the high priest. Before he was handed over to be condemned falsely by Pilate, he spent that night in that prison. And Lord God, we have this tradition that the Son of God, that Jesus himself prayed this prayer. My one companion is darkness. And so we know that when we are in darkness, that the darkness is not dark for you. When we are in darkness, we are not alone, because you have made the darkness your home in the abandonment and in the rejection of your Son, Jesus. Lord God, help us in darkness to see your face. Help us in darkness when we can't see to know that you are present. Help us to always have confidence in you. We make this prayer in the name of the one, Jesus, who entered into darkness for our sake. We love you. We ask this of you. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

God knows your name and has a specific task for you to perform in his service. Today, reflect on the words of St. John Henry Newman and ask God to show you what your task is. Ask him to give you the strength to complete it well.

Reflect on the **Word**

In the ancient world, a woman was considered her husband's property, and he could do whatever he wanted to her. This tension between men and women—where men are tempted to dominate and use women—is one of the consequences of the Fall.

- In the Bible, we see God limiting a man's total authority over his wife in favor of a higher law.
- Since the Israelites have just been set free from slavery, they do not know how to live as free people, so God is teaching them.
- They are shown a new way of treating jealousy between spouses. This is a definite step toward greater equality and respect between men and women.

Moses reminds the people of when God spoke to him face-to-face, which means speaking in a deeply personal way.

- The first commandment forbids graven images. This refers to images of other gods to be worshipped—that is, idols. However, the *Catechism* says that God "permitted the making of images that pointed symbolically toward salvation by the incarnate Word" (CCC 2130).
- The Ark of the Covenant, for example, is an image that God commanded his people to make. So God does not absolutely prohibit the making or use of images in worship; rather, he prohibits images to be worshipped—i.e., idolatry.
- By becoming incarnate, the Son of God introduced a new "economy of images." So the Catholic veneration of images is not contrary to the first commandment but is in fact a respectful veneration of what the image represents.

Numbers 5, Deuteronomy 5, Psalm 90

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise and glory. We thank you for your Word today. We thank you not only for your Word, we thank you for your faithfulness. Lord God, we find so often that we are unfaithful, and yet you are patient with us. We find that we are fickle, and yet you are stable, you are steadfast in your love for us. So this day, we give you praise. We thank you for continuing to speak to us. We thank you for continuing to be with us. We thank you for continuing to be ours, to be our God. You are not ashamed. Hebrews 11 says you are not ashamed to be our God. Thank you so much. Help us never to be ashamed to be your people, to belong to you, to be the sheep of your pasture, those you have chosen. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Veneration of images is a beautiful part of the Catholic Faith. Today, find a piece of sacred art to venerate respectfully—a beautiful image of Jesus, Mary, a saint, or another holy person. Praise God for the goodness and beauty of his creation and his presence in the world.

DAY 57: Hear, O Israel

Reflect on the **Word**

For the Israelites, the Nazirite vow includes keeping one's hair uncut and abstaining from alcohol, and it is typically not lifelong. The Nazirite vow, then, is a dedication of a particular time of one's life to the Lord.

- In Deuteronomy, we have the *Shema*, which is Hebrew for "hear": "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD; and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).
- The *Shema* is the heart of all of the Law of Moses.
- Every Church rule is intended to promote a relationship—with God and one another.

The people of Israel are instructed to take God's words and bind them on their foreheads and arms. This is the origin of what comes to be known as phylacteries—leather boxes containing words of the Old Testament that are strapped to one's forehead and arms.

In Mass, before the Gospel is proclaimed, we say, "Glory to you, O Lord." While the priest makes the sign of the cross on the Gospel text and on his forehead, we make the sign of the cross on our foreheads, lips, and hearts. This is a physical expression of our keeping the Word of God on our foreheads and our arms.

Numbers 6, Deuteronomy 6, Psalm 91

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, you are good. And you do protect us. You do care for us. You bear us up as on the wings of eagles. And you bear us up lest we dash our foot against the stone. Lord God, we do not put you to the test, because we are tested every day. Every day we are tried, and everyday life reveals the truth of our hearts. It reveals our fickle hearts. It reveals our shaky and quick-to-forget hearts. Lord, help us to never forget what you have done for us. Help us to never forget who you are. Help us to never forget what you have revealed about our own hearts. Help us to never forget you, Lord God. We make this prayer in the mighty name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

***Could women** take a Nazirite vow?*

Both men and women could take the Nazirite vow. For the most part, it was the same for both sexes. However, if a father of an unmarried woman or the husband of a wife declared his opposition to the vow, it would not be valid (see Numbers 30). This was a protection against rash vows. The strict requirements of the vow required careful consideration.

A person who took the Nazirite vow was bound to give up wine and all other things which came from grapes, refrain from cutting his or her hair, and avoid going near the dead. Even if a friend or family member passed away, the Nazarite could not go near the body without breaking his or her vow. These requirements were important to ponder before committing to them and were a beautiful sacrifice for men and women alike.

–Lavinia Spirito

Reflect on the **Word**

Numbers 7 seems to be an account of events that occur before Numbers 1.

- Before the worship of the Tabernacle begins, the twelve tribes of Israel come with their representatives to Moses and Aaron with gifts for both the sacrifice and the Levites.
- Every tribe contributes equally to the worship of the Tabernacle.
- Moses gives additional oxen and carts to the families of Gershon and Merari for their service, but he gives nothing to the sons of Kohath. The sons of Kohath are ordered to carry the holy objects that cannot be put on a cart or wagon due to their sacredness.
- The Israelites plan to take possession of the Promised Land and spare none of its current residents. Scripture will reveal why the Lord God is so firmly against the intermingling of the peoples.
- God knows that his Chosen People will want to be like the people around them, but they cannot—because the Lord loves them and has set them apart.

  God warns them that they must remain faithful to him in the face of danger so that the world will be blessed through them. The Lord is playing the "long game" of salvation here.

Numbers 7, Deuteronomy 7, Psalm 92

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we thank you so much for bringing us here again today. Lord God, you are faithful, and you keep us coming back to you. You help us to be faithful because you are so good. Lord God, this is day fifty-eight, and you have brought us to this day. You have brought us to this morning, to this midday, to this afternoon, to this evening. Lord, you have brought us to this moment because you are faithful. Even when we are unfaithful, even when we forget, you are faithful. And you never forget your children. Lord God, help us truly to belong to you. Help us to remain faithful not just by reading your Word and letting it be proclaimed to our ears and our minds and our hearts, but also, Lord God, like yesterday we prayed, help us to "Hear, O Israel" that we belong to you, that we love you with everything we have. Lord God, help us to love you with everything we have, even when we are weak, even when we struggle, even when we stumble, even when we sin. Lord God, help us. We know that you will never abandon us or give up on us. And so, Father, in Jesus' name we trust in you, we praise you, we thank you, and we ask for your continued faithfulness. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Are you sometimes singled out or looked at differently because of your faith in Jesus? If so, reflect on those times and ask God for the grace to be faithful to him. Know that your ancestors in faith, the Israelites, had to stand out to live out their part in God's plan of salvation.

Reflect on the **Word**

In Numbers, the people of Israel are still new to freedom, worshipping in the wilderness, and trusting in the Lord. In Deuteronomy, they have been wandering in the wilderness for almost forty years.

- In Exodus, God established the Passover as a perpetual institution. The Israelites are now instructed in how to celebrate the same ritual sacrifice every year going forward—with the lamb, bitter herbs, and unleavened bread.
- Anyone who refuses to participate in the Passover is cut off from the covenant.
- At the Last Supper, Jesus tells his apostles, "This is my blood of the covenant" (Matthew 26:28). The Passover is a foreshadowing of the gift of Jesus—the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world—in the Eucharist.
- As in the Passover, those who refuse to worship the Lord in the Eucharist cut themselves off from the covenant.

God tests his people to reveal the truth of himself to them before they go into the Promised Land and fight those who do not believe what they believe. The Israelites will be abundantly blessed, and God reminds them that they were tested in the wilderness to learn how to trust him and keep his commandments.

- While we can forget God in times of darkness, we can also do so in sunny days, when everything is going well, because we do not feel we need him. This is the temptation highlighted in Deuteronomy 8.

Numbers 8–9, Deuteronomy 8, Psalm 93

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we thank you and give you praise. Thank you so much for your Word and thank you so much for your guidance. Because, Lord, without you we are lost—without your light to illuminate the way, to light our path. Your word, O Lord, is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. Help us, Lord, to trust in your light. Help us to trust in the guidance that you give us. Help us to trust in your Word. Because, Lord, we can hear your Word and dismiss it. We can hear your Word and forget it. We can even see your great works, Lord, and we can forget them, and we can forget you. Help us never, ever to forget. Help us always to see where you are in our lives and always to hear your voice in our lives. Help us to always follow you wherever you lead no matter what. God, let that be our prayer today. Help us to follow you where you lead no matter what. We make this prayer in the mighty name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

God is good and deserves our praise, no matter how difficult or easy the season we are in. Take a few moments in prayer today and pray Psalm 93 again from your heart, praising God whether your day is joyful or difficult.

DAY 60: Intercessory Prayer

Reflect on the **Word**

As the people of Israel move, some of the tribes are in the lead, followed by the Tabernacle and the Levites, with the other tribes following the Tabernacle. The presence of the Lord and the sacred objects are in the center of their journeying.

- God tells the people that the wilderness is part of their story. Soon after being set free from slavery and brought into the desert, the people turn away from the Lord. Moses recounts a number of places where this happens: at Sinai with the golden calf, at Taberah where they complain, and at Massah where they are tempted.
- God brings his people to all these places to provide for them, yet they fail to trust in him. Moses himself intercedes on their behalf with the Lord.
- Like Moses, Jesus intercedes on our behalf with God the Father. The Lord hears the prayers of Moses, and he hears the prayers of his divine Son.

  In his actions with his people and with us, we see that God is "rich in mercy" (Ephesians 2:4).
- Even when we are unfaithful, God remains steadfast. He gives Moses the opportunity to mediate for his people. Ultimately, Jesus is sent as the one Mediator between God and man.

  As Christ's disciples, we are called to intercede for one another.

Numbers 10, Deuteronomy 9, Psalm 10

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we thank you and we give you praise, just like the psalmist praying this Psalm 10. Lord God, it seems like so often those who do not listen to you and those who do whatever they want—those who hurt other people among us—seem to be the most blessed sometimes. The ones who say, "Who cares about God? Where is God?" seem to have even happiness. They seem to even have joy. They seem to have maybe even sometimes more love than those who are listening to your Word and those who look for you in everything, Lord. Those who follow you sometimes seem to have more problems than those who forget about you, those who ignore you, even those who outright reject you. Lord God, this is such a mystery to us. This is just like the psalmist. We recognize the truth. The truth is that there are some people that want nothing to do with you, God, that seem to have everything going right for them. And some people who love you with their whole heart and seem to be forgotten. We know the truth, Lord God, that you are just. You do not forget the cry of the poor. You do not neglect those that you love. And so we continue to cry out to you. We continue to listen to your Word. We continue to place our trust, our hope, and our entire lives in you alone. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Following Moses' example of intercession and its fulfillment in Jesus, set aside some time today to intercede for those in your life who need prayers. Ask God to help them in whatever ways they need it and to show them his merciful heart.

DAY 61: Complaining in the Desert

Reflect on the **Word**

In Numbers 11, the Israelites are rebelling against God and complaining, like children who are not getting what they want.

- Even though God provides for them with manna, the people long for the food they ate back in Egypt. They have forgotten that this food came at the price of their freedom.
- We can be like the Israelites. We think that everything will go well for us if we follow Jesus. But Jesus never promised us health and wealth.
- Jesus said that we need to take up our crosses if we want to be his disciples. We will have troubles in this world, but we will belong to him. We will be free. Sometimes, though, we want to trade our freedom for comfort.
- Later, Moses is able to share the burden with seventy elders, who all receive the Holy Spirit. Even though Eldad and Medad are not among the seventy elders, they still receive the Holy Spirit and begin prophesying. Moses says that he wishes all the people of the Lord were prophets.
- When we are baptized, we are anointed priests, prophets, and kings. Every day, we need to ask: Am I exercising my anointing as a baptized follower of Jesus?

In Deuteronomy 10, Moses recaps the Israelites' desert wanderings. A key point in the retelling is that the Lord has set his heart and love upon the people of Israel.

- Likewise, the Lord has set his heart and love upon us as his disciples. Therefore, we follow the Ten Commandments, pray, and open our hearts to his Word.

Numbers 11, Deuteronomy 10, Psalm 33

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we thank you, and we give you praise. We know that in the challenges of life, you are there. And the challenges where we rely upon our own strength and on our own wisdom, you call us ever more deeply and ever more resolutely to rely upon your strength and to rely upon your wisdom. Yes, God, you ask us to use our own. The strength we have and the wisdom we have—you have given them to us as gifts, and yet you know that on our own we are bound to fail. And so, you offer us your strength. You offer us your wisdom. And you give it to us for free. It is your gift of grace. And so this day we accept your gift. This day we accept the gift of your strength and your wisdom. We ask that you please transform our hearts and help us. Set us free from what binds us and give us the power to lift up those around us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

***How can we see** God's goodness in stories such as the story of the plagues?*

In some stories of the Old Testament, God's actions seem harsh. His response seems to run counter to the compassion and mercy we see in Jesus. Of course, there cannot be "two different Gods" in the Bible, one that is all-loving, merciful, and kind and another that is angry, jealous, and willing to judge. God is one—so he is loving even when he is angry with sinful humanity; he is merciful even when he judges. As the *Catechism* tells us, our response to God's revelation must be faith (CCC 142–143).

We always need to see the Bible for what it truly is—the inspired Word of God. This means that God, Scripture's primary author, uses human authors to convey what he wants to reveal. When we struggle to understand, we need to remember God's words to Isaiah: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord" (Isaiah 55:8). Since God's ways are not ours, we should always approach the Bible in a spirit of humility and trust in his Word.

–Jeff Cavins

DAY 62: Spies Sent to Canaan

Reflect on the **Word**

Numbers tells the story of Israel in "real time." Deuteronomy, though, recalls the same story in past tense. For example, the events of Numbers 13 and 14 occur right after the Israelites have been freed from slavery in Egypt, while Deuteronomy depicts Moses telling the same story forty years later.

- Because she speaks ill of Moses even though God approves of him, Miriam is afflicted with leprosy as a punishment.
- Aaron then asks Moses to pray on Miriam's behalf. Here we see how suffering can heal division in families.
- The spies sent by Moses to scout the land of Canaan come across fortified cities and are frightened. They have spent their entire lives as slaves and do not know how to fight.
- Though God has set the Israelites free from Egyptian slavery with great signs and wonders, they still do not trust him. So the scouts return to Moses and report that they cannot enter Canaan.

In Deuteronomy 11, Moses warns the Israelites against becoming like the Canaanites after they enter the Promised Land. They need to remember the words of the Lord and all he has done for them.

- We have crosses in our churches and wear them around our necks as reminders of what God has done for us and how much he loves us.

Numbers 12–13, Deuteronomy 11, Psalm 94

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise, and we thank you for your Word. We thank you for speaking to us. We thank you for not only speaking to us in your Word and letting that Word that you have spoken shape our minds and our hearts and teaching us what to love and what to hate—but we also just thank you for choosing us. We thank you for letting us belong to you. We ask that you please give us the grace not only to have our minds and hearts shaped like yours, but also to let ourselves be chosen. Give us the grace to give you permission to love us like you want to love us and to call us how you want to call us. Give us the grace to be able to say yes to you in everything this day. We make this prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

HAZEROTH

Hazeroth, now called Ein Hudra, was one of the stops after the Israelites left Mount Horeb. It was here that Miriam was struck with leprosy. (See Numbers 11:35–12:16.)

Reflect on the **Word**

When the Israelite spies state that Israel cannot take the land of Canaan, the people respond in dismay, "Why didn't we just die in Egypt?" They even try to elect captains to bring them back to Egypt.

- The people of Israel still have the hearts and minds of slaves—they would rather return to slavery in Egypt than enter the land God has promised because it will be dangerous and difficult to conquer.
- As we will see, the book of Joshua narrates how Israel takes the Promised Land. God gives them the land, but they need to cooperate with him.
- Due to their lack of cooperation, God does not allow that generation to enter but only their children, who will have to fight to take possession.
- This is a lesson for us. If we are unwilling to fight against the things that enslave us (e.g., fears, bad habits, addictions) and move forward in freedom, our children will have to fight those battles.

In Deuteronomy 12, the Lord commands the Israelites to destroy all pagan shrines and prepare themselves for worship in the Temple. Similarly, as we have seen, we need to worship God in the way he commands.

We must continue to ask God to shape our minds and hearts so we can see the world, ourselves, and others the way he wants.

Numbers 14, Deuteronomy 12, Psalm 95

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we thank you and give you praise. We thank you so much for hearing our prayers. We thank you for when we are unfaithful, you remain faithful. And that is what we need. You are who we need because, Lord, the depths to which our fears can control us, the depths to which our lack of faith can control us is paralyzing at times. And yet, Lord, when we know who you are, there is no room for fear. When we love you, there is no room for fear because that perfect love casts out whatever fear we might experience. Lord, if our day today is marked with fear, we ask that you please place your love in our hearts. If our day today is marked with uncertainty and insecurity, we ask that you place your courage and your strength in our hearts. Lord God, above all we ask that you place us in the palm of your hand and help us to never run away. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

***Why do the people** of Israel "murmur" and complain so much?*

On their journey to the Promised Land, God's people struggle to learn that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (see Deuteronomy 8:3).

Leaving the culture of Egypt is not easy for Israel. The people of Israel are not getting what they want, but God is giving them what they need. To the degree that we yield to what we need rather than what we want, our complaining spirit subsides and our heart is softened, which leads to peace.

So the answer as to why the Israelites complain so much is found within our own hearts. Why do *we* complain so much? Ultimately, it is because we do not trust God. He calls us to entrust ourselves completely to his loving care—which means seeking his will. Only when we seek his ways over our own will we stop complaining and enjoy the blessings he wants to give us.

–Jeff Cavins

DAY 64: Consequences of Sin

Reflect on the **Word**

In Numbers 15, the Israelites are beginning their journey into the wilderness. Moses reminds them about the laws presented in the book of Leviticus.

- The heart of these laws is that God claims the Israelites as his own people and sets his love upon them.
- The consequences of breaking these laws—of sin—are severe, even shocking. How do we reconcile this with a God who is mercy and love?
- For those Israelites who intentionally rebel against him, the Lord will treat them as they have chosen to be treated—as if they are not a part of his people.

  God tells the people of Israel that, since he will bless the world through them, they must be different from the world.
- A key commandment in Deuteronomy is tithing. This is not simply for worship but to support the Levites since they do not have any land of their own. The tithe also provides for widows, orphans, and strangers.
- It can be difficult to understand how the same God who commands that those who break the Sabbath rest should be executed also commands care for widows and orphans. His people, though, have been called to be holy—that is, set apart.
- In Numbers 15, God instructs that there should be tassels on the Israelites' garments made of blue cord. This is to remind them of the commandments—to be faithful to his will rather than their own. The color blue is also used in the Tabernacle and in the garments of the priests—as a reminder of God's holiness.

Numbers 15, Deuteronomy 13–14, Psalm 96

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, thank you for your Word, and we thank you for your Scripture today. We thank you, also, for the great wisdom that you give to us in helping us understand your Word. Lord God, for all the times that we are perplexed and troubled, and not just perplexed but deeply troubled and deeply troubled in our heart by your teaching—what you reveal about yourself—we ask that you not only take away a spirit of skepticism or spirit of cynicism but you give us a spirit of openness, a spirit of truth, and a spirit of honesty—a spirit of trust, that when we don't understand, we ask. And when we still don't understand, we continue to ask. Lord God, give us a spirit of trust. Give us a spirit that is open to whatever it is you will for us this day and every day. We make this prayer in the mighty name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Tithing in the Old Testament supported the Levitical priests, as well as widows and orphans. In the Church today, tithing is still important for the support of priests, the care of the needy, and other important pastoral works. Today, consider how you give to the Church and what time, treasure, and talents you can put toward helping God's people.

DAY 65: Revolt Against Moses

Reflect on the **Word**

In Numbers 16, we see Korah, Abiram, and Dathan rebelling against Moses and Aaron. Korah is the offspring of Kohath. It is the responsibility of the Kohathites to care for the holy objects of the Tabernacle.

- After the sons of Aaron, the Kohathites are the closest to the presence of the Lord. However, they begin to question why only the sons of Aaron are allowed to offer sacrifice to the Lord.
- Dathan and Abiram resent God for leading them out of "a land flowing with milk and honey" only to "kill them in the wilderness."
- The Promised Land is described as "a land flowing with milk and honey" (see Exodus 3:8), but Dathan and Abiram use these words to describe Egypt, the place where they were enslaved. They are addicted to their past, and they must be cured of this addiction.
- In his anger, the Lord destroys the families of Korah, Abiram, and Dathan for their disobedience.

Even after the people of Israel witness God exact his judgment on Korah, Abiram, and Dathan, they still rebel against Moses and Aaron. Moses again offers incense to God as atonement for the people's sins.

Like the Israelites, we too can believe we were happier in the past, in our brokenness and bondage to sin, as God is leading us through the "desert" to true freedom.

- We see in Deuteronomy today that the Lord is a God of justice but also a God who cares for the poor. God commands the Israelites to take care of those who cannot take care of themselves and to do so without resentment.

Numbers 16, Deuteronomy 15–16, Psalm 97

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we thank you; we thank you, and we give you praise. We thank you for your justice. And you reveal that when you set up the people of Israel and when you gave them a law, when you gave them your law, you revealed your heart. Your heart is true. You are truth, Lord God. You are justice. You call your people just like you call us to live justice, to do right, to walk humbly, to love goodness, and to care for those who are around us. Lord God, help us to have hearts like yours. Hearts that love justice. Hearts that run away from evil. Hearts that hate evil. Hearts that are open to those around us who are in need. Lord God, before you we stand in need. So we ask you to send us your Holy Spirit to meet us in every one of our needs. You are the source of all goodness. You are the source of all truth. You are the source of all justice, and we need you. So come and be near us now. We make this prayer in the mighty name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Even if walking with God feels like walking through a desert, we can trust that God will provide for us. In prayer today, dwell on how God has provided for you even in difficult moments, and thank him for it!

Reflect on the **Word**

After the Israelites' repeated rebellion, they are put to the test by the Lord. The Lord tells Moses to take twelve rods and mark them with the names of the fathers of each tribe. When Moses brings the twelve rods before the Lord, Aaron's rod is the only one that blossoms. Therefore, the Lord says that only men from the tribe of Levi are to be his priests.

- If a sheep or ox is blemished or defective in any way, it cannot be offered to God in sacrifice. The Lord must receive only the very best from his people.
- Two or three witnesses are required to testify against one who commits idolatry before the person can be punished. This law helps prevent false accusations.

Though Israel will not have a king for many years, Deuteronomy 17 speaks about the limitations of royal authority and the duties of a king.

- Some royal laws: a king must not amass an army for himself or have multiple wives lest his heart turn away from the Lord and the people. (This is exactly what will happen with David's son, Solomon, who had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. His heart turned to serve other gods.)
- Deuteronomy 18 lists abominable practices that are prohibited, such as turning to sorcerers.

God promises to raise up a prophet like Moses from among the people, which is a messianic prophecy of the coming of Jesus. There are many prophets who are like Moses, but Jesus is the only one who perfectly fulfills the role of prophet.

Numbers 17, Deuteronomy 17–18, Psalm 98

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we thank you and give you praise. Lord God, your psalmist sings your praise and praises you better than we ever could, because it is your Word. It is your Holy Spirit, Lord, that helps us to pray. So we ask you please today to help us to pray because on our own we cannot pray as we ought. So, Lord, help us. Help us to give you praise. Help us to see your wisdom in your Word and to let it transform our minds and our hearts. And we give you thanks because you are good, and you do good. You are our Father, and we are your children. Thank you so much for claiming us as yours. And we claim you as ours, as is our right. We claim our rights in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

By virtue of your Baptism, you share in Jesus' prophetic, priestly, and kingly roles. When you were baptized, you recited the baptismal promises (or, if you were baptized as an infant, someone recited them in your stead). Those promises are still important for you today, so recite them again and recommit yourself to them.

DAY 67: God's Justice and Refuge

Reflect on the **Word**

As we hear in Numbers 18, all the tribes of Israel are given land except for the tribe of Levi—who will have God as their inheritance. Their role is to serve him by leading worship.

- For their service, they receive the tithe; they must rely on the other tribes of Israel to provide for their needs.
- The Levites must also offer their own tithe, a tenth of everything they have been given.
- Today in Deuteronomy, we hear about justice.
- An accused person will undergo a trial if more than one accuser comes forward. This shows that the Israelites must now be people of justice rather than vengeance.

According to Deuteronomy 20, people must always be permitted to surrender in war—except for the people of Canaan.

- The Canaanites live violent, wicked lives, including sacrificing their children to the god Molech. They have brought God's judgment upon themselves, which he will exact through Israel.
- God never commands us to do anything unjust; he cares for every individual. We can always trust that his judgments are right and just.

Numbers 18, Deuteronomy 19–20, Psalm 99

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise. We thank you. We give you glory. You are the God of glory and the God of justice. Lord God, you care for the people, you care for justice, you care for us. So we ask you today, as we ask you every day, Lord, make our hearts like yours. Make our hearts the kind of hearts that desire justice, that run away from vengeance but pursue after what is true and what is good and what is beautiful. Fill our minds with what is true. Fill our hearts with what is good. Fill our lives with what is beautiful. We give you praise, Lord God. Thank you, and be with us today and every day. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Are there areas in your life where you are tempted to desire vengeance rather than justice? Bring those to the Lord today and ask him to fill your heart with his justice and his mercy.

Reflect on the **Word**

The ceremony with the red heifer concerns forgiveness—going from unclean to clean, from being estranged to being brought back into the community.

- Numbers 19 also discusses when people are able to touch the body of a dead person. If one comes into contact with even the top of a grave, he or she is unclean.
- This foreshadows Jesus' description of the Pharisees as "whitewashed tombs" (Matthew 23:27). Someone might look clean on the outside, but that person is in fact unclean if his or her heart is far from God.
- In Numbers 20, as the Israelites wander through the desert of Zin, they complain to Moses and Aaron that they do not have any water. The Lord tells Moses to speak to a rock in front of the people and he will make water come forth from it—enough water for all of the people and their animals.
- Moses loses his temper and strikes the rock twice, and water comes forth. Due to his disobedience, the Lord tells Moses that he will not enter into the Promised Land. This might seem unfair due to Moses' previous and consistent fidelity to God. Because Moses is a leader, however, he is held to a higher standard.

In Deuteronomy 21, we see more laws that are challenging, yet wise. These laws are designed to make the people of Israel act in a less vicious, brutal way than the world around them; God is teaching them a new, more just way of living.

St. Paul later says that Jesus redeems us from the curse of the Law, having become a "curse" for us on the Cross. He quotes Deuteronomy 21 when he says, "For it is written, 'Cursed be every one who hangs on a tree' " (Galatians 3:13). Jesus lets himself be cursed so we can receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we know that you are good and you are faithful and that your faithfulness does endure for all generations. We ask that you help us to be faithful. Lord God, help us to see your faithfulness, your mercy, your justice, your truth, your goodness in all of your words. We ask you please to allow your Word to shape our eyes, our minds, our vision—and shape our hearts. Help us to love what you love and hate what you hate. Above all, help us to love you and to love our neighbor as ourselves. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Pray Psalm 100 again, focusing on giving God praise with the words of each line. Give him thanks for the good he has done for you and for our fathers in faith.

DAY 69: The Bronze Serpent

Reflect on the **Word**

At the beginning of this chapter, the Israelites complain once again that God has led them into the wilderness to kill them. So God sends serpents as punishment, which kill many. Again, Moses intercedes for the people.

- Even though Moses understands that he will not enter the Promised Land, he continues to shepherd the Israelites and intercede on their behalf with the Lord.
- God tells Moses to fashion a bronze serpent, which will heal all those who look upon it. This foreshadows the ministry of Jesus, who says that the Son of Man must be lifted up in order for people to be saved (see John 3:14).

  Because serpents are the cause of pain and death, God gives the Israelites a bronze serpent to heal them. The very image of what caused their suffering will be the cause of their healing. Similarly, when we look upon the image of Jesus on the Cross, we see the sign of sin and shame become the symbol of hope and salvation.
- Here in Deuteronomy, the various laws God gives his people are intended to make a vicious, brutal world less so. Some examples: if your brother needs help, God's law says you must help him; kindness must be shown to animals; men must treat women with respect and never bring false shame upon them or treat them as disposable.
- In his laws, God affirms that his people matter because they belong to him.

  Deuteronomy 22 states that when a man lies with a betrothed virgin, both are to be stoned to death due to their fornication. But if a woman is being sexually attacked, she must cry out for help. Here, the Bible makes a distinction between a woman who consents to sexual sin and one who is being raped. Victims of sexual assault remain worthy in the eyes of the Lord.
- Even when we sin, God loves us and can make us new. No one is disqualified from his love.

Numbers 21, Deuteronomy 22, Psalm 102

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise, and we thank you. We thank you for your Word. We thank you for loving us. We thank you for choosing us. We thank you for showing us your heart, the heart of a Father who loves his children. In the midst of this day, Lord, we call out to your name. We call upon your name, and we ask you, Father, to send us your Holy Spirit in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. As you receive our thanks and as you receive our praise in Jesus' name, we ask you also to send out your Holy Spirit upon us in Jesus' name. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

When we become discouraged or are having a hard time living as God calls us to live, we should look to Mary as our example of what it means to be full of grace. Take some time today in prayer to think about Mary's example and ask for her help in becoming a saint.

DAY 70: The Offense of Balaam

Reflect on the **Word**

Balaam, a soothsayer, is hired by Balak, the son of the king of Moab, to curse God's people, but instead he will speak blessings upon the people of Israel.

- Though God commands him not to curse his people, Balaam is impressed by the powerful people sent to him and the money offered to him by Balak.
- Then, a donkey speaks to him, which ultimately saves his life. This is a miracle.
- St. Ambrose says that Balaam's offense is that "he said one thing and plotted another … For God seeks out a pure vessel, one not corrupted by impurity and squalor. Balaam was tested, therefore, but he was not found acceptable: 'For he was full of lies and guile.' "***

In the New Testament, St. Peter writes that some people "forsaking the right way … have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing" (2 Peter 2:15).

- Balaam is willing to sell his soul for money, fame, and power. This can be our temptation, as well.

Numbers 22, Deuteronomy 23, Psalm 105

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise. We do praise you, Lord God in heaven, because you are good and you are true and you are just. You are just and right in all your ways. We continually affirm that truth—even, Lord, when we are unfaithful, you are faithful. This is a common refrain so we give you praise, because you are truth itself. You are justice itself and you are mercy and you are love. Let us be loved. Let us live in your justice. Let us walk in your truth and dwell in your peace. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

ARNON RIVER

This is the Arnon River near Aroer. Balak went to meet Balaam near this river. (See Numbers 22:36.)

DAY 71: The Source of the Law

Reflect on the **Word**

Balak continues in his attempt to convince Balaam to curse the people of Israel, but this does not go well.

- In their commentaries on the passage, the Church Fathers do not consider Balaam to be an honorable man. It appears that Balaam, in the end, seems to do what God wants, but he is a man for hire. He is out for himself. He is not necessarily interested in doing God's will.
- God initially uses a donkey to speak to Balaam, and then he will use a greater "donkey"—Balaam—to speak his words and bless his people.
- Deuteronomy 24 and 25 cover various laws, but the connection between them is their source—the Lord. The laws here can seem arbitrary or unnecessary, but they will be needed at some point in the various situations the people of Israel will encounter.
- If a man is found guilty of some crime or injustice against another, the Law says that he should be beaten according to the severity of the crime—but no more than forty lashes. More than forty lashes would dishonor him. The image on the Shroud of Turin shows that Jesus would have received far more than forty lashes. The Romans, of course, did not follow the law of the Old Testament.

  Oxen must not be muzzled while they are treading out the grain. Why? So that they can eat while they work. Again, this speaks to the kindness that the people of Israel must show to their animals.
- As we continue to read Scripture, we will discover that many of its passages may not be what we expect but what we need.

Numbers 23, Deuteronomy 24–25, Psalm 106

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we thank you so much for your gift, for your Word. We thank you for the reminder, this Psalm 106. We give you praise for it because it is just this synopsis, and it invites us to do, Lord God, what you keep reminding us to do, which is to remember. Remember what you have done. Remember your faithfulness. And remember all the ways in which we are broken, all the ways in which we have failed to belong to you. And yet, you continue to call us back to yourself. Lord God, today, please call us back to yourself. Today, give us a spirit of repentance. Today, give us a spirit of trust and confidence in your mercy for us. And give us your Holy Spirit, that we may be your people this day and every day. We make this prayer in the mighty name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Have you ever researched the Shroud of Turin? If not, look into its history, the scientific experiments and facts surrounding it, and images of it today.

DAY 72: The Plains of Moab

Reflect on the **Word**

Balaam is unable to curse the people of Israel and instead speaks words of blessing over them four times. God gives Balaam the words to say.

- At this point, the Israelites are living on the plains of Moab, waiting to enter the Promised Land.
- The Bible says that the people of Israel "play the harlot" with the daughters of Moab. They invite the Israelites to the sacrifice of their gods.
- While the Lord prevents Balaam from cursing his people, they are unfaithful to him. This speaks of the goodness of God and the weakness of the human heart.
- Phinehas is praised for rising up against the idolatry and infidelity of the Israelites.

In Deuteronomy 26, the people of Israel are commanded to give the firstfruits of their fields to the Lord.

- They are also commanded to offer a tithe every third year—not just for the Lord but for the care of widows, orphans, and strangers.
- This is something that specifically marks our Judeo-Christian heritage. We do not need to look to a political system or government to care for the poor; we are obligated to help them ourselves.

Imagine how transformed our world would be if we took this duty seriously.

Numbers 24–25, Deuteronomy 26, Psalm 107

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, thank you so much for your Word. Thank you so much for your blessing. Thank you, God, that we know that we have enemies in this world. We have enemies in the natural world. We have enemies in the spiritual world—we have enemies in the supernatural world. And yet you are on our side. You fight for us. And yet while others may desire to curse us, Lord Jesus Christ, in your own name, you bless us. In your own name, by your own power, by your own goodness, by your own love for us, you utter a blessing over every one of us. And I ask you, please Lord God, once again this day as we are listening to these words, send your word of blessing into our lives, into our hearts, into the people that we love, the people that we care about, the people that we have tried to help but it seems like nothing helps. O God, speak your word of blessing over all of them and over all of us. We make this prayer in the mighty name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

BALAAM INSCRIPTION

During an excavation at Deir Allah in 1967, a piece of plaster with a written text was found, circa 840–760 BC, that has many parallels with the original Balaam story. (See Numbers 22–24.)

DAY 73: Inheritance of Land

Reflect on the **Word**

Here, at the end of Numbers, we see the tribes of Israel being numbered again. The Israelites are getting ready for war, so they need to know the number of fighting men in each tribe.

- Overall, there is little change in the numbering—about two thousand fewer men.
- Moses makes it clear that when the people take possession of the Promised Land, it will be divided according to the number in each tribe. The larger tribes will get a larger inheritance while the smaller tribes will get a smaller inheritance.
- The tribe of Levi, of course, does not receive an inheritance, as they are tasked with serving the Lord in worship. God himself is their inheritance.

  The Levites will live in the towns and lead worship in the place God establishes. Ultimately, they will lead worship in the Temple, the home of the Ark of the Covenant.
- The Israelites are given land by God himself. Divine Providence is involved in everything.

Numbers 26, Deuteronomy 27, Psalm 111

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, it is true, and your praise endures forever. We give you thanks. Let us praise you every day. Let us be like Judah, that praise goes up first in this moment. We offer you our firstfruits in this moment. We offer you our hearts. We offer you our everything in the best way, Lord God, that we know that we can love you. These three ways that we know we can love you—we know that we can show you our love by worshipping you, we can show you our love by obeying your commandments, and we can show you our love by loving and caring for our brother and our sister among us. Help us to do all those three things, Lord God. Help us to be people who love you with everything we have and everything we are. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Pray for the poor today and ask for the Lord's blessing on them. Ask God to inspire you and the rest of God's people to live generously.

DAY 74: Joshua Appointed

Reflect on the **Word**

In Deuteronomy, Moses tells what has come before and establishes the Law for a second time before the people enter the Promised Land.

- Now the timelines in Numbers and Deuteronomy are coming closer.
- The line of Manasseh, the son of Joseph, goes all the way to Zelophehad, who only has daughters. Since an inheritance is typically passed down only to sons, there is a question as to who should inherit. Since the daughters of Zelophehad want to honor the Lord, Moses is told that if a man dies with no sons, then his inheritance should go to his daughters.
- Joshua (along with Caleb) is one of the two spies sent into Canaan who returned and said that the Israelites could take the land. Ultimately, he will lead the people into the Promised Land.
- In front of the community, Moses lays his hands on Joshua and appoints him as his successor. This act resembles the "laying on of hands" at a priestly ordination in the Church.

Joshua (or *Yeshua*) is the same name as Jesus. As Joshua leads the people across the river Jordan into the Promised Land, so Jesus leads the people of God through the waters of Baptism into the true Promised Land of salvation.

Deuteronomy 28 lists blessings and curses. The Lord promises blessing even if we do not experience immediate blessings as a consequence of doing good. In the end, we get what we choose—good or evil, blessing or curse.

Numbers 27–28, Deuteronomy 28, Psalm 112

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise and glory. Thank you so much for your Word. We thank you so much for filling us with your light and with your truth. We thank you for the fact that you are a God of justice. Lord God, we declare your justice to be just, and we declare your goodness to be good—not because you need us or our declaration but because we need to continue to declare that your justice is right and just and that your goodness is truly good. Help us to choose the right, Lord God. Help us to obey your commandments. Help us to walk in your ways regardless of the consequences, regardless of immediate blessings or delayed blessings. Lord God, help us to be faithful because you are just and you are true and you are God forever. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Just as Moses appointed Joshua with the laying on of hands, the Church appoints priests to serve the people of God through ordination. Today, pray for our priests that they may know God's heart and bring it to others.

DAY 75: The Keeping of Vows

Reflect on the **Word**

Numbers 29 offers a review of major feasts, including the Feast of Booths and the Day of Atonement.

- On the Day of Atonement, the Israelites afflict themselves as a sign of sorrow for their sins. On this day, they offer sacrifices in atonement for their transgressions.
- On the Feast of Booths, the Israelites give many offerings because it is a feast of abundance. It is a way of saying, "Lord, you have given us so much, so we are giving back to you in gratitude."
- The Lord does not need anything, of course. But he asks his people to give back to him from the abundance of blessing he has given.
- We need to keep in mind that the laws of Moses are not given to people living in an ideal world—they are given to those living in a broken world. They point the people toward a more perfect way of living.
- Since a vow is a promise made to God, it is binding.

  This is why Jesus talks about not taking oaths. This means we should never make a vow lightly, without careful and prayerful consideration, because we take our lives into our hands when we make a vow to the Lord.

  In Deuteronomy 29, the Lord renews his covenant with his people. He renews his command not to turn to other gods because he knows that this is what they will want to do.

Numbers 29–30, Deuteronomy 29, Psalm 113

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we do give you praise. We give you glory. We thank you for this day. We thank you for the gift of your Word. We thank you for the gift of your heart because you share your heart with us by sharing your Word with us. In a special way, we give you praise for sharing the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, with us and giving us access to your heart, Father. In Jesus Christ and the power of your Holy Spirit, you give us access to your heart, and we give you praise for that. Especially, as we are coming closer and closer to the end of this desert wandering and coming into the period of Conquest and Judges, we ask you to please give us courage, give us strength, give us a persistence and a perseverance to be able to continue to listen to your Word, to allow it to shape our heart. And above all, give us your Holy Spirit that we can have access to your heart and that we have the courage to pursue you with everything we are. We make this prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Today, recall any sacred promises you have made in your life—for example, marriage vows or religious vows. Ask for the Lord's help in remaining faithful to your vows.

DAY 76: War Against Midian

Reflect on the **Word**

The people of Israel have been infected by the idolatry of the Midianites. Before they enter the Promised Land, they must first go to battle to put an end to this corruption.

- This is not because God wants death. This warfare would not have existed if the people of Israel had been faithful.
- It is because of the people's weakness that Moses commands the total destruction of the Midianites.
- Deuteronomy 30 shows that this is not what God ultimately wants. At the end of Moses' speech, he tells the Israelites that life and death have been set before them. The Lord implores them to choose life so that he can bless and prosper them and their descendants.

  In the book of Wisdom, we read that God did not make death and does not rejoice in the death of the living—regardless of how unfaithful they are (see Wisdom 1:13).
- We have the same human nature as the people of Israel, so we always need to recognize our own weakness.
- What are the things that take our hearts away from the Lord? Are we willing to do whatever is necessary—that is, fight any battle—to get rid of them?

  In the Liturgy of the Hours, every Catholic priest prays Psalm 116 regularly. The Psalm says, "I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the Lord" (Psalm 116:17). This is what we do at every Mass.

Numbers 31, Deuteronomy 30, Psalm 116

Take It to **Prayer**

Lord God, we do give you thanks and praise today. We thank you for your Word. We thank you for giving us the gift of faith even in the midst of complex, troubling, and confrontational readings. Lord God, you give us your truth, and you give us a sign of your heart that you do set before us life and good, death and destruction. You want us to choose life. This is your will for us, that we choose life. And yet, Lord God, we are so fickle. We are so quick to turn away from you. We are so quick to forget that you love us with the love of a father. We turn to other things. We turn to other people. We ultimately end up betraying you, the one who has loved us like no one has ever loved us. So God, help us. Help us. Please help us this day, not only to be faithful, but when we have been unfaithful, help us to turn to you and know that we can trust you in your goodness and your love and your mercy. We make this prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

What are the things that take your heart away from the Lord? What do you need to do to get rid of them? Take these questions to the Lord in prayer today and ask him to help you fight these important battles.

Reflect on the **Word**

The sons of Reuben and Gad say that the land on the east of the Jordan is good for cattle. Since they have cattle, they want to stay there where things are comfortable. They would rather not take the land that God has for them.

- Moses tells the sons of Reuben and Gad that if they do not fight, the other tribes will not want to fight, either. So they make an agreement that their wives, children, cattle, and possessions can stay, but every man of fighting age must go into the Promised Land and join the battle with the other tribes to take it.
- God has a plan for us. We are in the midst of a battle. We must be willing to fight, or the people around us will not be willing to fight.
- In Deuteronomy 31, Moses and Joshua receive a powerful word from the Lord—a word that God repeats to Joshua: "Be strong and of good courage" (Deuteronomy 31:6, 7; see Joshua 1:6, 9).

  God says this because he will be with the people in their battle. He will fight for them. He knows, however, that they will not remain faithful to him.
- In times of suffering, we can also be tempted to turn away from God, wondering where he is in it. But God has promised that he will fight for us, even though he knows we will fail and be faithless.
- We need to ask God to help us come back to him.

Numbers 32, Deuteronomy 31, Psalm 117

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise, and we give you glory. We lift up our voices to you. We lift up our hearts to you. We know that you are the Lord. You are God. You are good, and you call us to be yours, even though you know our weakness, even though you know our frailty, even though you know that we will turn away from you. You still fight for us. You still call us to belong to you. You still love us, even in the midst of our faithlessness. You love us when we do not love you. You are good and you are God, and we give you praise today. Help us in our weaknesses. Help us when we have fallen, when we have failed. Remind us of your faithfulness so that we can turn back to you, call upon your mercy, call upon your grace, and be restored by your love. We make this prayer in the mighty name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

God is always faithful—even when we forget about him, turn away from him, or betray him. Today, spend some time in prayer to praise and thank God for his faithfulness and his mercy. Ask him to help you to always return to him after you have failed.

DAY 78: The Song of Moses

Reflect on the **Word**

In Numbers 33, we get a recap of the Israelites' journey.

- In Deuteronomy 32, God gives Moses a song that he tells him to teach to the people. The song seems to be somewhat harsh, speaking mostly of their faithlessness. It says that when they choose to be faithless, he will let them have what they have chosen.
- We hear in Psalm 118 that the mercy of the Lord endures forever. When we call upon the Lord, he will answer us and set us free.
- Psalm 118 also says that although the Lord chastens us, he will not give us over to death. This is essentially what the song of Moses proclaims as well.

  Seeking after something other than the Lord will cause the Israelites pain. But God will let them experience this pain so they can see how good he is—and that he will never abandon them. We all need to learn this lesson.

  God can rightfully be jealous of us because we belong to him. We do not belong to other "gods."
- God lets us go after other things, though, so we will learn that he is the only one we really need—the only one who loves us and saves us.

  Even when we are faithless, God remains faithful.

Numbers 33, Deuteronomy 32, Psalm 118

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we do give you praise. Your mercy does endure forever, and we love you. We love you for that. We love you for who you are. We love for all your blessings. We love for your true fatherhood. Help us to be true sons and daughters of such a good dad. We make this prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

***Is there any difference** between the terms "Hebrews," "Israelites," and "Jews"?*

Yes, the Bible uses various names for God's people that do not always refer to exactly the same group. In the time of Abraham, we encounter the "Hebrews"—those who came from Ur of the Chaldeans into the land of Canaan. After the Lord changed Jacob's name to Israel ("he who strives or struggles with God"), the term "Israelites" became more common.

The name "Israel" included all twelve tribes until the kingdom of David was divided in 930 BC. At that point the ten northern tribes were known as the kingdom of Israel, while the two southern tribes formed the kingdom of Judah. In 722 BC, Israel was destroyed by Assyria, while the kingdom of Judah remained for over one hundred years until it was conquered by the Babylonians. This destruction was a punishment for disobedience to the Lord.

The name "Jews" (and the name of the religion "Judaism") is derived from Judah, which remains the common name used for God's Chosen People today. As a descendent of David, Jesus is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.

–Jeff Cavins

Reflect on the **Word**

Numbers 34 presents the boundaries of the land of Canaan. The Promised Land is not an abstract idea but a tangible, real-world place. This is not just a story.

- Judaism and Christianity are historical religions. God truly interacted with the people of Israel and spoke to them. Our faith is rooted in time and space, in historical realities. As human beings, we are both matter and spirit, body and soul.
- Psalm 120 is the first of the "psalms of ascent," Psalms 120–134. These psalms are associated with the Israelites' three major feasts.
- Because Jerusalem is situated on Mount Zion, one has to go up—that is, ascend—to reach the Temple.

Some of these psalms of ascent are psalms of joy, others are hymns, and still others are psalms of lament. Psalm 120 is a psalm of lament.

- Psalm 120 speaks about how God is truly present in times of distress.

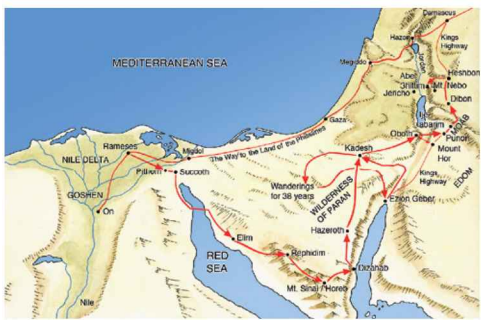
These psalms sing about all of the great joys and trials of life. They remind us that we are called to worship God in all circumstances.

Numbers 34, Deuteronomy 33, Psalm 120

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we thank you, and we praise your name. We thank you for being with us on this journey. You are the one who initiated this journey, God. You are always the one who leads us. You are always the one who speaks first. You are the one who moves first. You are the one who loves us first. All of our prayers to you, all of our listening to you, and all of our loving you back is simply a response to your initiative. So we just thank you. We thank you that if we are hearing these words, we know that you have chosen us—because you have loved us. Lord God, you choose your people, and you continue to guide them and fight for them. And we know that you continue to choose us, as messed up as we are. And you continue to love us and fight for us. Lord God, help us to love you back. And help us to respond to your fighting for us by being the kind of people who are willing to not fight against you but to fight with you. Help us to love you well and the people around us well. We make this prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, Our Lord. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**



EXODUS ROUTE

This map shows a reconstruction of a traditional route of the Exodus. The Israelites left Goshen in the Nile delta and went to Mount Sinai, where they camped for about one year and where the Tabernacle was made.

DAY 80: Cities of Refuge

Reflect on the **Word**

Today's readings conclude the books of Numbers and Deuteronomy, as well as the period of the Desert Wanderings.

- Numbers 35 mentions the forty-eight cities in which the Levites dwell. Six of these settlements are known as "cities of refuge."
- The cities of refuge are places of justice for those who have killed a person, to save them from the vengeance of the people.
- This is the beginning of distinguishing between manslaughter and murder.
- More than one witness must testify to the alleged crime of murder. Confirmed testimony is required when accusing someone of a capital offense, as we see throughout the Bible.
- As we have seen, when a man dies without sons, his land passes to his daughters. To prevent a man from owning the additional land of a wife of a different tribe, marriage is only permitted within the tribe.
- This reflects how important inheritance—land—is to a tribe.
- We belong to one another and have certain responsibilities to one other. We are not meant to live on our own, independent from others. We truly cannot do whatever we want. We are bound to live as God calls us to live.

Numbers 35–36, Deuteronomy 34, Psalm 121

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise and glory. We thank you this day and every day for being with us on this journey. We thank you for guiding us on this journey through these desert wanderings. We thank you for your faithfulness because, Lord, you meet us in our weakness. You meet us in our unfaithfulness even in the small call to be faithful to hearing your Word every single day. Lord God, when we fail in that—today is our day eighty. Even if we failed a bunch of times, this is day eighty of this journey through the Bible. We are all so grateful that you continue to guide us on this journey and you continue to lead us and you continue to speak to us and you continue to shape our hearts to be more and more like yours, to shape our vision of you and of the world to be more and more like yours. Help us to see like you. Help us to live like you. Help us to love like you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

VIEW FROM MOUNT NEBO

This view from the slopes of Mount Nebo shows the plains of Moab where the camp of Israel was located at the time of Moses' death. (See Deuteronomy 34.)

Desert Wanderings **Recap**

After being camped at Mount Sinai for a year, Israel left their traveling home in the desert with the hope of fulfilling the first promise to Abraham—acquiring a land of their own. When the twelve spies returned from Canaan, they were pessimistic about conquering the Canaanites. Their failure to trust the Lord resulted in forty years of wandering in the desert. The people needed to learn how to fulfill the will of God.

Desert Wanderings **Review Questions**

Use these questions to test your knowledge of the time period you just finished. Answers are below. No matter how many you can answer, celebrate the accomplishment of finishing this period!

1. In what place did Israel stop and send spies into the land of Canaan?
2. What did the spies bring back from the land of Canaan, showing its fruitfulness?
3. The Israelites were divided into two groups in the desert—those who would die in the wilderness and those who would prepare to go forward and enter the Promised Land. How old were those who would go forward to victory?
4. Moses was overwhelmed with the responsibilities of leading Israel during their wandering in the desert. How many men did he appoint as his assistants?
5. Who challenged Moses' authority in the desert and became leprous as a result?
6. Moses was not allowed by the Lord to lead Israel into the Promised Land. What was the name of the mountain upon which he died?
7. Who was Moses' successor, who led the people into the Promised Land?

1. Kadesh Barnea

2. A cluster of grapes so large that it took two men to carry it

3. Younger than twenty

4. Seventy

5. Miriam

6. Mount Nebo

7. Joshua

Green is the color of the **CONQUEST and JUDGES** time period because it represents the green hills of Canaan.

Key **Events & Figures**

After forty years of wandering in the desert, the children of Israel camp in the area of Moab on the eastern side of the Dead Sea. They then cross the Jordan River and conquer Jericho after marching around it seven times, with trumpets blaring and people shouting. After being defeated at Ai due to their disobedience to God, Israel continues their conquest of Canaan with a central, southern, and northern campaign.

Joshua leads the people in a renewal of the covenant at Mount Ebal. Israel then settles the land according to the twelve tribes. The Tabernacle rests in Shiloh in the territory of Ephraim. After giving a final exhortation to the people, Joshua dies, leaving Israel without a leader.

The book of Judges recalls Israel's cycle of sin, leading to a reliance on judges who would rise up and defeat Israel's enemies.

What **Changes?**

Moses' leadership has been passed on to Joshua. The people of Israel no longer eat manna in the desert, as they will now eat the food of the Promised Land.

At the Tabernacle in the desert, Israel is organized according to tribes, each of which will inhabit a part of the Promised Land. The northwestern region of Canaan has large cities, while the southeastern region is made up of small towns. This geographic reality contributes to the way Israel is influenced by the culture and religion of the Canaanites.

The land of Canaan is the "highway" from Mesopotamia in the north to Egypt in the south. Every nation wants this land, and Israel needs to rely entirely on God to keep it.

DAY 81: Israel Crosses the Jordan

Reflect on the **Word**

Today, we see Joshua established as the "new Moses" who will lead the people of Israel across the river Jordan into the Promised Land.

- The river's waters are halted by the Presence of the Lord in the Ark of the Covenant.
- The first words of the Lord to Joshua are meant not just for him but for the entire people of Israel: "Be strong and of good courage" (Joshua 1:9). That is, they should be neither frightened nor dismayed, for the Lord will be with them wherever they go.
- Even in the midst of struggles, trials, and failure, we can still be strong and of good courage because the Lord is with us in our hearts.

  The word "courage" comes from the Latin *cor*, "heart." To be *discouraged* is to lose heart, but to be *encouraged* is to be given strength of heart.
- Even when we have seen God do amazing things in our lives, we can quickly forget and give in to fear and anxiety. In the dark, we can forget what we knew in the light. We can forget that God is always with us in the midst of the battle.
- The Lord commands the Israelites to take stones from the Jordan and make a pile for an altar. Whenever God's people see this altar of stones, they will remember what he did for them.
- Write down whatever insights you receive when you read the Bible; it is so easy to forget them. These will be your very own "stones from the Jordan" to help you remember. These insights will serve as reminders of why we should always be of good courage: God is with us.

Joshua 1–4, Psalm 123

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we thank you and give you praise. We glorify your name. We just are reminded, Lord God, of your goodness. We are reminded of your faithfulness. We are reminded of the need to be reminded. We are reminded of the need to remember. Lord God, this day, as we hear these words and as we pray and we let your Word shape us, Lord God, let our lives be a memorial. Let our lives, our hearts, our minds remember who you are and what you have done in this world and in our lives. Help us never, ever to forget your goodness, and to never, ever forget your presence. We make this prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

***Why was Joshua** chosen as Moses' successor rather than one of his sons?*

Moses' leadership of the people of Israel was not hereditary. We hear very little about Moses' two sons in the sacred text. Because Moses disobeyed the Lord's command and struck the rock in the wilderness, he was denied entrance into the Promised Land himself. So God selected Joshua to lead the people across the Jordan River. As we read, "The LORD commissioned Joshua the son of Nun" (Deuteronomy 31:23).

Joshua was the best man for the job. He was permitted to ascend Mount Sinai with Moses, as well as to come to the Tent of Meeting. He was an experienced military commander, and he was one of the two scouts who proclaimed that Israel could indeed capture the land of Canaan with the help of the Lord. Finally, he was commissioned by Moses as his successor: "Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands upon him; so the sons of Israel obeyed him, and did as the LORD had commanded Moses" (Deuteronomy 34:9).

–Lavinia Spirito

DAY 82: The Valley of Achor

Reflect on the **Word**

When the Israelites enter the Promised Land, the Lord tells Joshua that all the men need to be circumcised. (During their forty-year journey in the wilderness, no one has been circumcised.) When a man is circumcised, he is brought into the covenant.

- The people of Israel are being fully delivered from their former slavery. The covenant is being renewed.
- They then celebrate the Feast of the Passover—and the manna ceases. The Lord cared for them throughout their wandering in the desert, and now he will care for them in a different way.
- The culture of the Canaanites is built upon wickedness, upon the denigration of the human person. They sacrifice their children to the god Molech (or, Moloch). So this battle is truly a "cosmic" battle—a moral battle—not simply a battle for territory.
- As St. Paul tells us, our battle is not with flesh and blood but with principalities and powers (see Ephesians 6:12). Only the eyes of faith enable us to see this reality.
- Achan takes plunder from the ruins of Jericho, so he, his family, and everything he owns are destroyed.

  While this judgment might sound brutal, it is just. Achan's sin comes at the price of thirty-six lives at the battle of Ai. The place where he dies is named the Valley of Achor, which means "trouble."
- Each of us has past wounds that continue to have a hold on us. We need to give God permission to transform this woundedness.

Joshua 5–7, Psalm 125

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise, and we thank you. We thank you for sharing this story with us. Thank you for being part of our stories—as we, like Achan, can be unfaithful knowing exactly what you have asked us to do. So often, Lord, we turn away and do what we want to do. Lord, the heart of every sin is knowing what you want and yet doing what we want in violation of that. And so, we come back to you knowing that in our guilt you meet us with your mercy. In our shame, you meet us with your reconciliation. And so please, Lord God, transform our Valley of Achor into a door of hope—hope for our lives, hope for our children, for our families, hope for our culture, hope for our world, hope for your people. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Identify your Valley of Achor and give God permission to transform your wounds. Let God speak his promises to you through the words of Hosea 2:14-23.

DAY 83: The Gibeonite Trickery

Reflect on the **Word**

At the battle of Ai, we see Joshua's military strategy of ambush, drawing out the people of the city as the larger troop of Israelites goes in.

- The kings of the peoples beyond the Jordan—the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites—join forces because they realize that the Israelites are powerful and that the Lord is fighting with them.
- The Gibeonites, though, trick the Israelites into making a covenant with them. They dress up as if they have come from a long journey, although they live only a couple of days away.
- The Israelites believe them, partake of their provisions, and enter into a covenant with them without seeking direction from the Lord.
- A covenant establishes a bond, a relationship that is unbreakable. So the Israelites honor a bad covenant they were tricked into, with some consequences.

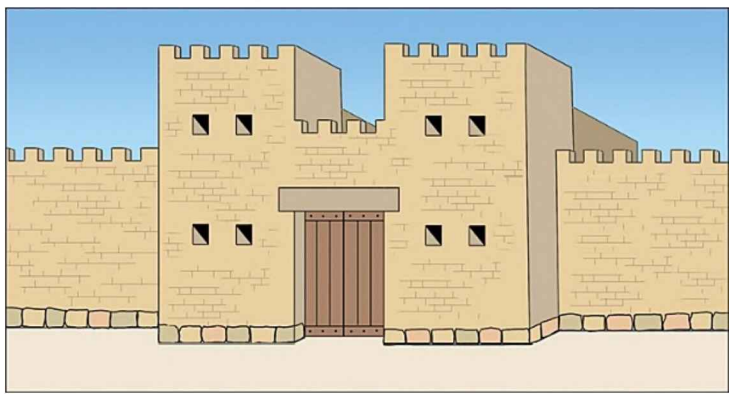
  The Gibeonites, then, are brought into the story of salvation "sideways"—in an imperfect way. Later, Gibeon becomes the place where the Ark of the Covenant stays for a time in the days of David. God does great things with the people of Gibeon as they enter more deeply into a relationship with him through Israel.
- Sometimes, our relationship with God is imperfect. We might be faithful just to avoid hell. The Lord, though, calls us to live as his sons and daughters. We are his family.

Joshua 8–9, Psalm 126

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise and glory. We thank you. We just give you thanks, Lord God, because you are good and your deeds are good. That is what we need to be reminded of again and again. Lord God, in the course of our daily lives we seek out your counsel and desire to do only those things that are in your will, only those things that you are calling us to do. And we also desire to live in the freedom of that obedience, live in that freedom of belonging to you and choosing to say yes to you with everything we have. Help us to do that with your grace, with your salvation, with your mercy, and with your power. We make this prayer in the mighty name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**



GATE OF AI

Based on archaeological evidence, this reconstruction shows the multichambered gate of Ai. The gate was found in Kh. el-Maqatir, a site that is a candidate for the city of Ai, the second city destroyed by Joshua. (See Joshua 8.)

Reflect on the **Word**

Good science and good faith can never contradict one another because both are in pursuit of truth. Truth can never contradict truth.

- Some hold that the description in Joshua is a description of a day when the sun actually stands still or the rotation of the earth stops to make one day extend to the length of two days. This is absolutely possible. It would be a supernatural miracle. God can do miracles.
- We also recognize that the Bible sometimes uses figures of speech or poetic language. The symbolic meaning here could be that the victory of the Israelites is like a battle that has gone on for two days.
- All of these battles are not part of God's original plan. He wants people to know him, belong to him, and say yes to him—to live in harmony with each other and with him. His original plan is not death, destruction, and violence. It is only because of our broken, fallen nature that God allows in his plan what we read about.

  In the book of Revelation, John writes that he saw a multitude of people from every tribe and nation, from every race and ethnicity, all gathered and united as one holy family (see Revelation 7:9). So the Lord does not want a battle of races, ethnicities, or peoples. He wills the triumph of his name and that all people, even in this broken world, come to know him and be united with one another.
- The last line of Joshua 11 says, "And the land had rest from war." That is what God wants for all of us.
- Let us keep on fighting, not *against* each other but *for* each other.

Joshua 10–11, Psalm 128

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we know that you have revealed yourself to us, and so we thank you. We know that what you revealed is that you desire justice, you desire peace. You are the God of peace. In fact, you reveal yourself to us fully in the revelation of Jesus—that he is the Prince of Peace. And yet, when we hear so many stories of war and of battle and of violence, it can cause us to question. So we ask you, Lord, to please give us interior peace. Give us a sense of understanding of what it is that you want to teach us today and what it is that you want us to receive today. We make this prayer in the name of the Prince of Peace, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

BURNT TEMPLE AT HAZOR

The stones in the lower half of the wall of the temple at Hazor (below the black line) show signs of severe burning. The excavator dates the destruction to the time of Joshua. (See Joshua 11:11.)

DAY 85: Fighting for Each Other

Reflect on the **Word**

Here, we see troubled times. God's original plan was peace and harmony—within every person, with one another, and with him.

- In this broken, divided world, though, God actually commands war, which can be difficult to understand.
- Why is this warfare so violent and brutal? As we read in Numbers, it is because God knows that his holy people are going to be tempted to live as the people around them. God has a plan for the Chosen People, and he knows that if they simply try to coexist with the pagan nations around them, they will not fulfill it.

We need to keep three things in mind as Joshua leads the people of Israel into battle.

- First, the people are entering into the land of the Canaanites, who practice sexual depravity and child sacrifice.

Second, some of the biblical text here seems to be hyperbole. For example, in Deuteronomy 7, after God calls for the destruction of everyone, he then commands his people not to marry the people or do business with them. So clearly the killing of every single individual is not meant here. (Along those lines, in Joshua 10, the Lord tells the Israelites to leave no survivors in the cities, but some of the inhabitants remain in Joshua 15.)

- Third, God has revealed that this is a limited engagement with just the people of Canaan. Ultimately, God seeks the reconciliation—not the destruction—of all people.
- Once again, since we see that it is God's plan for us to be united, let us keep fighting for each other and praying for one another.

Joshua 12–14, Psalm 129

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise and glory. We thank you for bringing us to this day. We thank you for bringing us all the way through the Bible, to this point; your Word, to this point. And we know that without your Word, we would not know who you are. We would not know who we are, God, without your revealing yourself to us and revealing your heart to us. Yes, we can see your traces, we can see your fingerprints in the world around us. We can see hints at your truth in the created world, the world you created, as we can see the person of the artist in the artwork. Yet Lord, we still might not know your heart unless you reveal your heart to us. So we ask you to please continue to reveal your heart to us that we can reveal our hearts to you. We make this prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Pray today for peace and harmony in our world, according to God's plan. God wants us to be united. Even when there is warfare and destruction and chaos, we should strive to fight for and pray for each other.

DAY 86: The Real Presence of God

Reflect on the **Word**

Go to the maps at the back of *The Great Adventure Catholic Bible* and follow with your eyes what you are hearing with your ears. These were real places with real people.

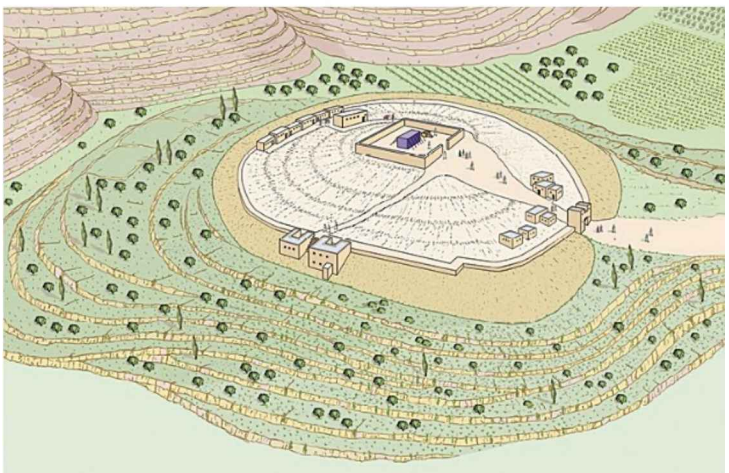
- Christianity is a historical faith, and the events of the Bible took place at specific times in real geographical locations.
- In the person of Jesus, the Word took flesh and dwelt among us at a particular time in a particular place.
- Following Jesus today is the same. We must live our discipleship here and now.
- As you are driving to work, taking a walk, doing the dishes, or reading your Bible—no matter what you are doing, God is with you today just as he was with the people of Israel.
- God is not distant. Know that he guides your path. God guides everyone who seeks to be faithful to him.

Joshua 15–18, Psalm 130

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise and glory. We thank you for this time together. We thank you for the names and the fact that, God, this is a real story. It's a true story with real places and real people and a real time. And we are giving you praise because we are also real people in a real place in a real time. And we know that just as you acted in the lives of the people of Israel, you act in our lives today. Help us to see your hand and to see your work, to follow your will, and to do it in all times and in all things. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**



SHILOH

This reconstruction drawing shows Shiloh during the time of Samuel, looking northeast. The Tabernacle is shown on top of the hill, inside some sort of permanent structure, possibly the remains of a Canaanite temple courtyard. (See Joshua 18:1; 1 Samuel 1:3.)

DAY 87: God Keeps His Promises

Reflect on the **Word**

Today, we again read lists of names, places, and things. These are more than just lists; they are historical records that touch on God's interaction with his people.

- The final lines today sum up the reason why all those tribes and places are presented: "The LORD gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers; not one of all their enemies had withstood them … Not one of all the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed" (Joshua 21:44-45).
- This fulfillment of God's promises occurs over multiple generations. But the Lord is faithful.
- The promises of the Lord, though, require the people of Israel to be faithful to him and cooperate with his will—to obey him and fight.
- God always fulfills what he has promised, but this does not mean the fulfillment happens immediately or without a fight.

Psalm 131 is a prayer of humble trust. It speaks of resting in the Lord's arms as a child does in the arms of his mother, in peace.

- Much of our lives is spent striving and battling. Sometimes, this is what we have been called to, but often we strive and battle against the Lord.

Joshua 19–21, Psalm 131

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise, and we thank you. We give you glory and honor, and every breath we have is from you. Every heartbeat is from you. And so, we thank you for every heartbeat. We thank you with every heartbeat. We thank you for every breath. And we thank you with every breath. Lord God, you have given them to us for free, and we are so blind to them so often. So every moment of every day, especially this day, every heartbeat, every breath—let every one be a prayer of praise, a prayer of thanks to you. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

***What were** the cities of refuge?*

In the Promised Land, the Levites received forty-eight cities instead of an inheritance of land. Six of these cities were "cities of refuge": Golan, Ramoth, and Bezer to the east of the Jordan River; Kedesh, Shechem, and Hebron to the west.

The law of Moses stated that anyone who committed murder was to be put to death (see Exodus 21:14). If a person killed another unintentionally, he could flee to a city of refuge for protection (see Exodus 21:13). The city of refuge provided safety from the member of the family tasked with avenging the relative's death (see Numbers 35:19).

During the trial of the accused murderer, the community would determine whether he acted intentionally or unintentionally. If the death was unintentional, the person could live in the city of refuge. If the person fled from the city of refuge before the high priest at the time of his trial had died, the family could avenge the death of their relative. Upon the death of the high priest, the attacker was free to return to his property without consequence. (See Numbers 35:24-28.)

–Jeff Cavins

DAY 88: Joshua's Last Words to Israel

Reflect on the **Word**

Like Moses' words, Joshua's final words to the people are words of challenge.

- Joshua tells them he knows they will fail to follow the Lord—but the Lord will not fail.
- God will not falter in his love for them, or his choice of them.

We have heard the story and know what has happened. Now Joshua is challenging the people of Israel to fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and faithfulness.

- He tells them to put away the gods their fathers served and serve only the Lord.
- If they are unwilling to serve the Lord, they must choose this day whom they will serve.
- We might have idols in our lives—money, success, comfort. We need to choose to serve Jesus Christ. We must stop pretending.
- Joshua proclaims the powerful words we all should live by: "As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24:16).

Joshua 22–24, Psalm 132

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise and glory. We thank you so much for bringing us through the book of Joshua and bringing us through this story, this history of the way in which you have fought for your people and the way in which you are calling us to faithfulness: the way you are reminding us of the dignity of being your sons and daughters, the dignity of being chosen by you—but also the responsibility of having been chosen by you to be faithful, to trust in you. Father, we ask you to please help us. Help us to trust in you. Help us to be faithful to you, because you are faithful. Your love is unstoppable. And we ask you to please help us to live and walk in that love every day, especially this day. We make this prayer in the mighty name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

***How can God** be jealous?*

In giving the Ten Commandments, God tells his people, "I the LORD your God am a jealous God" (Exodus 20:5). On its face, this does not seem right, especially when we listen to St. Paul tell the Galatians that jealousy is among "the works of the flesh" (see Galatians 5:19-20). Taking a closer look, though, we can see how both biblical uses of jealousy can be understood correctly.

There is a jealousy that is sinful when one covets what others have, such as social status, economic advantage, education, or success of children. We have no right to be jealous of such things. This kind of jealousy results in evils like theft, murder, slander, and division.

When the covenant bond of marriage has been wounded or broken, however, a spouse can rightfully become "jealous" with the hope of restoring the covenant relationship. God exhibits this kind of jealousy toward his people when they go after foreign gods, thus breaking their covenant with him. So it is right for God to be "jealous" for us, but it is wrong for us to be jealous of other people's advantages.

–Jeff Cavins

DAY 89: Israel's Cycle of Disobedience

Reflect on the **Word**

While Joshua is alive, the people are faithful. After he and the other elders die, though, the following generation fails to do what Moses and Joshua had commanded. The people forget what God has done for them and fail to teach this to their children every day.

- Thus begins a cycle of disobedience, distress, repentance, the Lord's intervention with a redeemer, and renewal.
- We read about the first three judges: Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar.
- The twelve judges named in the book of Judges are redeemers and generals, people who lead others into battle in dark and violent times. While they are not perfect, they are effective in defeating their enemies.
- The story of Naomi and Ruth shows that only true worship of the Lord and belonging to his covenant matters in the end, not ethnic origin.

  When Ruth proclaims that "your God will be my God," she is essentially converting, becoming a member of the covenant.
- Through the line of Ruth will come David, as well as his descendant Jesus. So the Savior of the world comes from a woman who begins life as a Moabite but who dies in covenant with the Lord.
- The battle, then, is between true worship of God and having a relationship with him versus false worship and essentially having a relationship with evil.

Judges 1–3, Ruth 1, Psalm 133

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise and glory. We thank you so much for your Word. We thank you for these stories that you reveal to us, because you reveal to us that even in the midst of trial, even in the midst of our unfaithfulness—once again, in the midst of unfaithfulness—you are faithful. You fight for us. You give us a deliverer whose name is Jesus Christ. And it is in his name that we pray to you this day. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

We, too, must never forget what God had done for us and must never fail to teach this to our children. Today, remember what God has done for you as your Father and praise him for it. Then pray for the children in your family.

DAY 90: Ruth and Boaz

Reflect on the **Word**

In Moab, Ruth marries the son of Naomi and Elimelech and has plans for a full life and a family with him. Then he dies, along with her father-in-law and brother-in-law. She is in trouble, with no certainty that things will get better.

- Yet she keeps walking in faithfulness with Naomi, a good mother-in-law who will be faithful to her.
- In the midst of all this, Ruth works hard, and Boaz notices her and protects her.
- Sometimes, hope takes a long time. To God, a thousand years are like a single day and a single day is like a thousand years.
- As we recall, Adam and Eve rebelled against the Lord and experienced the consequences of their disobedience. God, however, promised a redeemer. He said to the Serpent, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15).

In Judges 4, we see a foreshadowing of the fulfillment of God's promise. Jael crushes the head of the enemy.

- Ultimately, the Enemy's head is crushed by the Messiah, Jesus, the Redeemer. We belong to him; he is the One in whom we place our trust.
- Even when we walk in darkness, we do not walk alone. We walk in hope, knowing that everything can change in the Lord.

Judges 4–5, Ruth 2, Psalm 134

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise, and we give you thanks—just even, Lord God, hearing this story of the faithfulness of this woman who did not know you—this woman, Ruth, who did not know you, and yet she was faithful to what she did know. She was faithful to her mother-in-law. And Lord, you are blessing her in this story. You're blessing not only Ruth but also Naomi and also Boaz, this man who will be blessed, and also the people of Israel, who will receive a king through this incredible woman, this woman of faithfulness. Lord God, help us to be faithful like Ruth. Help us to be faithful not only to our relationships, our families, but also faithful to you. Lord God, when things are difficult, and when things are dark and it seems like our faithfulness is only met with trouble, and when it seems like it would just be easier to be unfaithful, help us to hold on and cling to you in the darkness. We make this prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

MOUNT TABOR

Deborah called Barak to rally the Israelite forces at Mount Tabor and fight Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, near Megiddo. (See Judges 4.)

DAY 91: Gideon's Story

Reflect on the **Word**

The story of Gideon (whose name was changed to Jerubbaal) starts out with his crushing the altar of Baal and the Asherah.

- The *ephod* is a garment the priests wear when serving the Lord. Gideon makes a golden ephod—merely a representation of what is used to worship the living God—and this becomes a snare for Gideon and his family. Though he contends against false gods, he sets up his family to turn back to these false gods.
- When Gideon dies, the people who made the covenant with the living and true God again worship a false god. The land was given rest, but the people turn from true and living worship to idolatry.

  We can twist our version of God and think it is the true and living God.
- In Ruth 3, we see the "kinsman-redeemer" (*goel*) as a defined role in the life of Israel. If an Israelite falls into slavery, loses land, or is killed, a kinsman-redeemer will rescue him or her or ensure justice (see Leviticus 25:25, 25:48; Numbers 35). A kinsman-redeemer will also carry on the family name by marrying a childless widow (see Deuteronomy 25:5-10)—like Ruth.
- The role of the kinsman-redeemer is to buy people out of slavery. Through his passion, death, and resurrection, this is what Jesus has done. He has redeemed us from the slavery of death by dying and rising from the dead so that you and I can have eternal life.

Judges 6–8, Ruth 3, Psalm 135

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, may your name be praised. May your name be glorified. May we know who you are and lift up our voices and our hearts to always honor you and always praise you and always thank you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

WELL OF HAROD

Gideon assembled many Israelites at the spring of Harod and observed how they drank from the water in order to choose the men to go to battle with him. (See Judges 7.)

DAY 92: Jephthah's Vow

Reflect on the **Word**

After the death of Gideon (Jerubbaal), his son Abimelech sets himself up as essentially a king.

- As we have seen, there is a repeated cycle with the people of Israel: the Lord blesses them, they turn away from him to worship other gods, tragedy befalls them, they repent of their idolatry, they turn back to the Lord, he helps them, and they are restored.
- Jephthah, one of Gilead's sons, is the son of a harlot, so he is rejected by his family—but he becomes a mighty warrior.
- Jephthah knows that God prohibits human sacrifice, and yet he makes a rash vow to the Lord. He promises that, if God gives him victory, he will sacrifice to the Lord whoever comes out of the house when he comes back home.
- "Heroes" of the Bible can be good and strong in some ways but can also be foolish and unfaithful. This rash vow of Jephthah is an example to avoid.

We always want to make wise promises to the Lord rather than acting rashly.

- God does not desire the death of the living but that all might have fullness of life.

Judges 9–11, Ruth 4, Psalm 137

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise and glory. We give you honor, and we just declare our love for you and our gratitude for who you are and all you have given to us, this day and every day. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

As we have seen, there are various stories in the Bible that cause us to pause and ponder how we can reconcile the violent events with God's love and mercy. Today turn to the appendix on page 259 of this companion to read a reflection from Jeff Cavins that will present some principles to keep in mind.

DAY 93: Strengths and Weaknesses

Reflect on the **Word**

We have heard about several judges: Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, and Samson, the most well-known of all the judges.

- The Lord comes to Manoah and his wife, who will be blessed with a son.
- We should remember to pray for all couples who are having difficulties conceiving or those who are experiencing a crisis pregnancy.
- It is rare that a person is consecrated a Nazirite from birth and lives this way for his or her entire life. Samson is consecrated this way.
- Samson is not a particularly "good guy." He is a "hero" because he is strong, but he is not wise. He is consecrated, but he is not living a consecrated life.
- After he kills the lion, Samson eats honey from its carcass. So he is touching a dead thing, which is forbidden under the Law. He then gives his parents some of the honey, which makes them ritually unclean also.
- Though strong, Samson has many weaknesses, particularly his passions: his anger and lust will get him into trouble.

Like Samson, we all have certain strengths and weaknesses. Rather than despairing about our weaknesses or dismissing them, we take them to the Lord and ask him to heal us and purify us. We humbly ask him to help us so our weaknesses will not be our downfall, as they will be for Samson.

Judges 12–15, Psalm 146

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise and glory. We thank you so much for the gift of yourself, the gift of faith, the gift of your Word you have given to us every single day these last ninety-three days. Lord, you keep speaking to us, and you keep teaching us. You teach us not only about ourselves and about our history, but you teach us about your heart. You teach us about yourself. So we ask that you please continue to allow our ears to be open, our hearts to be open, our minds to be shaped by who you are and what you call us to. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

What are some of your strengths? What are some of your weaknesses? Take them to the Lord, praising him for the gifts he has given you, and ask him to strengthen you in your weaknesses.

DAY 94: Samson and Delilah

Reflect on the **Word**

Samson is ruled by his passions; he lets his emotions and desires overwhelm him.

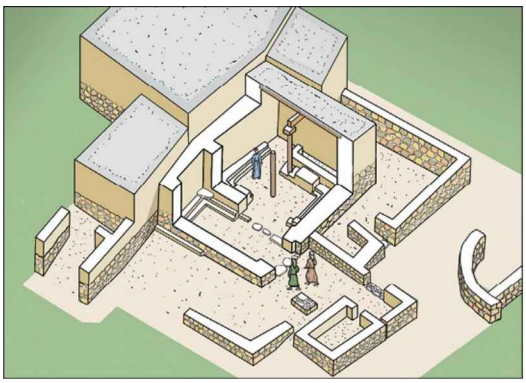
- Delilah asks him repeatedly to tell her the secret of his strength. Samson does not fully trust her, so he lies to her the first three times she asks. Ultimately, he gives in to Delilah's questioning and tells her the truth. She has not shown herself to be trustworthy, so this is a foolish thing to do.
- As we have seen all the way back in Exodus, God often works through broken people. Though Samson is a judge of Israel, he is foolish in many ways.
- Judges is an encouraging book to read in times of distress. We see that some of the greatest people God raises up are also broken human beings. Though God's people are not perfect, they are still his. We are not perfect, but we still belong to the Lord.
- In Judges 17 and 18, we see the story of Micah and the Levite. Micah has an idol and sets up a shrine so he and his neighbors can worship it. He then finds a Levite, one who is mercenary—basically, a priest for hire.
- We can be fickle and turn away from what the Lord has asked us to do. We pretend that we do not know what we are doing. The tendency toward self-deception can be great in all of us. The Bible is a mirror, reflecting to us the truth about our hearts and showing us how we can either go with the crowd against the Lord or serve him truthfully.

Judges 16–18, Psalm 147

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we do praise you. We do give you glory. We do lift up your name because you are God. You are the God who not only has created all things, you are the source of all being, you are the foundation of all that exists. You are the source of reality and substance, and you also reveal your heart to us, which is phenomenal. We can't even comprehend this, God, so we thank you. You—the God who is above everything, the source of everything—have chosen to care for us. You have chosen to care about us. You have chosen to reveal your heart to us. Help us to see your heart, and to know your heart, and to follow your heart, and to find our place in your heart this day and every day of our lives. We make this prayer in the mighty name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**



PHILISTINE TEMPLE

This drawing shows a reconstruction of a typical Philistine temple with two pillars that supported the roof. This temple was excavated in Tel Qasile near Tel Aviv, about fifty miles north of Gaza. (See Judges 16:25-30.)

DAY 95: The Sin of Benjamin

Reflect on the **Word**

At the end of the book of Judges, we read some of the darkest episodes in the Bible.

- A Levite priest takes a concubine. In Genesis 2, God makes it clear that a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and they will become one flesh. There can be serious consequences to breaking God's law.
- The men of Gibeah kill the woman. Her body is cut up into twelve pieces and sent to the twelve tribes of Israel.
- As a consequence, the other tribes fight against the tribe of Benjamin and kill many. They vow that none of their daughters will become a wife of a Benjaminite. So then they go to Jabesh-gilead, kill many, and kidnap four hundred unmarried women. They even give permission to the Benjaminites to kidnap women who are worshipping the Lord at Shiloh.
- As the final line of Judges states, "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25).
- This sums up the state of our present world. In our secular society, people do what they think is right in their own eyes. Everyone seeks his or her own "truth." But the truth has been revealed to us by God. We simply choose not to follow it.
- The Lord offers us redemption, however, if we repent and seek to follow the truth.
- We need to recognize our rebellion, turn away from it, and call out to the Lord. He hears our prayers, just like he heard the prayers of the Israelites—and he will come to our aid.

Judges 19–21, Psalm 148

Take It to **Prayer**

Father, it is right that we give you praise, and it is right that we give you glory. In the midst of true horror, in the midst of true evil, we thank you for your Word. We thank you for being our King. We thank you for guiding us, not only in the depths of our conscience, not only with your Spirit, but also with your truth and with your life, with your law, with your Word, and by your grace that gives us power to accomplish your will and accomplish your word and accomplish your law. Thank you, Father. We give you praise today. Help us to keep moving forward. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Why does such evil happen *to the Levite's concubine?*

The story of the murder and dismemberment of the concubine underlines the moral and social degradation of the Israelites. The Chosen People are influenced by the idolatry and depravity of the pagan peoples who surround them.

When the Levite and his concubine spend the night in Gibeah, we see that the depraved Benjaminites have become just like their Canaanite neighbors, demanding sexual violence as their right. This is reminiscent of Genesis 19 when the men of Sodom demand that Lot send out his guests so that they can "know" them. In the end, Sodom (and Gomorrah) suffer the consequences of their depravity. They are destroyed by the Lord.

The woman's dismemberment and the distribution of the pieces of her body to the tribes lead to justifiable outrage and a demand for vengeance. The Levite knows better than to perpetrate such a disrespectful act since the Law requires a proper burial (see Deuteronomy 21:23). This horrific story illustrates the darkness of the period of the judges. The need for order and a godly ruler is urgent.

–Lavinia Spirito

DAY 96: Hannah's Prayer

Reflect on the **Word**

The first book of Samuel begins by presenting Samuel's origins. Hannah and her husband regularly go up to worship the Lord in Shiloh. Hannah desires to have a child.

- Eli sees Hannah as she is praying at the Tabernacle of the Lord and encourages her.
- Many centuries later, St. Monica prays for her son, Augustine, knowing only God can save his soul and bring him to the truth in Jesus. As Monica weeps and prays, the bishop St. Ambrose tells her the child of so many tears will never be lost. (See St. Augustine's *Confessions*, book 3.) St. Ambrose gives St. Monica confidence to continue praying for her son, just as Eli encourages Hannah.
- Ultimately, Augustine will be converted and become a great saint—as well as one of the most influential theologians in the history of the Church. It all begins with a mother's prayer.
- Hannah prays, and the Lord gives her a son, Samuel. Before he is even conceived, she promises that she will dedicate his life to God. Hannah's prayer and promise is both heartbreakingly heroic and loving.
- We all have longings in our hearts, things we desire so much. When we receive these gifts, we can cling to them rather than the Lord. We always need to see them as gifts that we must give back to him.
- We will hear much about Eli, whose actions are not always exemplary. Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, take from the sacrifice of the Lord, and they have sexual relations with women who serve before the Lord's Tabernacle.
- Instead of following through in disciplining his sons for their bad behavior, Eli just rebukes them and lets them be. As a result of Eli's negligence, the blessing will pass away from his family, as we will see.

1 Samuel 1–2, Psalm 149

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we do give you praise. We do lift up your name. We want you to be glorified, Father. God, you are good, and you are glorified this day and every day, whether we acknowledge it, whether we even notice or recognize your great glory. Lord God, you are the source of all goodness, and all goodness on its own gives you praise. Every beautiful thing praises you because you are the source of all beauty. Every true thing praises you because you are the source of all truth. Every good thing praises you, even if it praises you in ignorance, because you are the source of all goodness. And so, help us to always, always recognize your hand and your sustaining power in goodness and truth and beauty. Come to us in our need with your power. Come to us in our brokenness with your healing. And come to us in our weakness with your strength. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Learn more about the story of St. Monica and St. Augustine today. There are many books, articles, and movies about St. Monica's prayers and St. Augustine's conversion. As you learn, pray for those who are on a path leading away from God, that they may come to know him.

DAY 97: Samuel's Prophecy

Reflect on the **Word**

While others are going about their business, Samuel places himself before the Ark of the Lord; he sleeps near God's very presence. So he is able to hear the Lord's voice.

- Eli tells Samuel that the next time he hears the voice of God, he should say, "Speak, LORD, for your servant hears" (1 Samuel 3:9).
- As we pray and read the Bible, we say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears." We are placing ourselves under God's grace and allowing him to speak to us through his Word.
- The people of Israel treat the Ark as a weapon rather than as the presence of the Lord himself. God cannot be manipulated. The Israelites are defeated by the Philistines because they try to use the Lord's Ark rather than relying on the Lord.
- As a consequence, Israel loses the Ark of the Covenant to the Philistines, who place it in the same temple as their god. But the statue of Dagon falls on its face, and people are killed. They send the Ark to Gath and then to Ekron, but the same things happen.
- Almighty God can fight his own battles. The battle he fights today is for you and for me. He invites us into his presence like Samuel so that he can fight for us.

  God calls us to repentance. If Eli had changed and corrected his sons Hophni and Phinehas, the story could have turned out differently.
- We are all broken and in need of God's grace. He wants to fight for us, but we have to be willing to let the Lord have victory over us.

1 Samuel 3–5, Psalm 150

Take It to **Prayer**

Lord God, we give you praise. Father in heaven, we thank you so much for your Word. We thank you for revealing yourself to us. We thank you for calling us to be part of this community that prays for each other, that walks together, that listens to your Word and lets it shape our minds and our hearts. We ask that you please help us to allow your Word to do exactly that, to be a lens shaper for us, to be a heart shaper for us—that your Word changes us. Not that we just learn new things or hear new stories or be reminded of old stories, but that your Word actually makes a difference. We know, Lord God, that your Word does not go forth from you and return to you empty. But it always accomplishes the purpose for which you sent it. And so we give you permission: whatever it is, Lord God. Whatever mission you have for your Word in our lives today, we give you permission to accomplish your will. We give you permission in our lives—not that we need to, but you are so good that you are very humble, and you will not force yourself, but you are patient with us. Thank you, God. Please receive our thanks and praise this day. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Begin your prayer time today with Samuel's words, "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears." Really strive to offer God a heart that is open to hearing his voice.

DAY 98: Israel Asks for a King

Reflect on the **Word**

We are told that Samuel is a good judge and prophet. His sons, though, turn out to be wicked.

- As Christians, we hear the expression that God has only children, not grandchildren. Every generation must choose to follow him as the Father.
- The Levites are the fathers of the people. As we have seen, prior to the idolatry of the golden calf incident at Sinai, the father of each family was its priest.
- In the Church, priests are the fathers of a parish. As fathers, it is devastating when we do not see our children alive in their faith.
- Let us take a moment and pray for all those loved ones who have turned away from the Lord and walked away from the Church.
- At the end of 1 Samuel, the people ask for a king. They want to be like other nations. God's plan was for him to be their King, yet they want a human king.

Samuel warns the people of what will happen if they get a king: he will put their sons and daughters to work for him and take a tenth of their property. The people reply that this is fine because they want to be like everyone else.

This is the story of all our lives, too. God wants to guide and guard us, but we so often prefer to take a "secondhand god." Yet God can use even some of these broken desires of ours to do something incredible.

1 Samuel 6–8, *Psalm 86*

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, you are our helper, and you are our comforter. And Lord God, we ask that you are also our vindicator, that you are the One who rises up and who declares and makes us righteous. It's not our own works, Lord God, that make us righteous in your sight. It's you. It's your grace that you have given to us, that you won on the Cross when you handed yourself over for us, Lord God. You made it possible for us to experience your mercy, to have access to the heart of the Father, and to be able to receive the Holy Spirit deep into our hearts. So we ask you, Father in heaven, in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, renew that Spirit—that Holy Spirit—in our lives so that everything we do may begin with your inspiration and be carried out by your saving and loving help to its completion which gives you glory. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Take time to pray for all those loved ones who have turned away from the Lord and walked away from the Church. The Divine Mercy Chaplet is a beautiful devotion to turn to.

Conquest and Judges **Recap**

When Israel finally possessed the land of Canaan, the emphasis changed from an external battle to an inward one—from fighting the Canaanites for the land to giving their whole hearts in obedience to God and his Law. The people of Israel experienced the cycle of sin and their need of God's merciful forgiveness. Israel discovered that leadership is important; without it, every man would do what was right in his own eyes rather than follow God's ways.

Conquest and Judges **Review Questions**

Use these questions to test your knowledge of the time period you just finished. Answers are below. No matter how many you can answer, celebrate the accomplishment of finishing another period!

1. What was the name of the woman in Jericho who treated the spies with compassion?
2. What went before Israel as they crossed the Jordan?
3. What was the name of the man who stole idols at Ai, where Israel was defeated?
4. Israel was fooled into entering a covenant with people who falsely said they were ambassadors from a distant country. Who were these people?
5. Who was the only female judge in the book of Judges?
6. Which tribe permanently moved from the south to the north due to their weakness at fending off their enemies?
7. Which judge had an angel appear to him who said, "The LORD is with you, you mighty man of valor"?

1. *Rahab*
2. *The Ark of the Covenant*
3. *Achan*
4. *The Gibeonites*
5. *Deborah*
6. *Dan*
7. *Gideon*

Gold is the color of the **MESSIANIC FULFILLMENT** time period because it represents the gifts of the Magi.

Key **Events & Figures**

The Gospel of John presents Jesus as "the Word made flesh." More than a third of John (chapters 12–19) focuses on the final week of Jesus' life, showing us that he is the Savior of the world. John provides several "portraits" of who Jesus is and his ministry, giving us deep insights into his character and nature. John records detailed conversations of Jesus with individuals such as Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, Martha, Mary Magdalene, and Peter.

John's Gospel contains perhaps the most metaphors for Jesus of any of the Gospels. In John, Jesus makes several "I AM" statements that give us insight into the scope and depth of his mission:

I AM the bread of life, the living bread.
I AM the light of the world.
Before Abraham was, I AM.
I AM the door.
I AM the good shepherd.
I AM the resurrection and the life.
I AM the way, the truth, and the life.
I AM the true vine.
I AM he.

What **Changes?**

John shows that Jesus is the One who fulfills all of the prophecies and promises of the Old Testament. In Jesus, God "has a face" and dwells among his people. As Jesus says, "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). In the Old Testament, to see the face of God would result in death, but in his Son Jesus, God reveals himself completely and brings us into an intimate relationship with him.

John himself offers the purpose of his Gospel: "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). John uses the word "believe" about one hundred times, proving that faith in Jesus is essential for salvation.

DAY 99: The Word Became Flesh

Reflect on the **Word**

The Beloved Apostle, St. John, the author of the Gospel of John, is there from the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry. He has been a follower of St. John the Baptist.

- In its opening words, John's Gospel establishes Jesus' identity: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God … And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:1, 14). Jesus is not just another prophet, healer, or wise teacher. He is the Word made flesh—the divine Son of God.
- In the Nicene Creed, we proclaim Jesus is "God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God." As John 3:16 states, the Father so loved the world that he gave his beloved Son, his only begotten Son, that we might not perish but might have eternal life.
- When John the Baptist sees Jesus coming toward him, he exclaims, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). To the Jews, a lamb is a sacrifice. Jesus is the Lamb who will be sacrificed on the Cross for the forgiveness of sins. He offers himself up to the Father on our behalf for our salvation.
- In Genesis, the Lord tells Abraham to take his beloved son Isaac and offer him up as a sacrifice. When Isaac asks his father where the lamb is for the sacrifice, Abraham responds that God himself will provide the lamb. (See Genesis 22.) Jesus is the Lamb.
- When Moses lifts up the bronze serpent in the wilderness, the sign of the people's sin becomes a sign of hope. (See Numbers 21.) This foreshadows Jesus lifted up on the Cross. The sign of sin and death becomes the sign of hope for all who believe in him.
- God's promise to Abraham is dynasty, land, and worldwide blessing. Through the people of Israel, God will bless the entire world with salvation. As John writes, "For God so loved the world …" (John 3:16). The Church truly is universal—its members are from every nationality, language, and race.
- The Church is established by God to proclaim to every individual person in the whole world that he or she is known and loved by God—and has been called into a covenant relationship with him so that everyone might be saved and might not perish but have eternal life.

John 1–3, Proverbs 5:1-6

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise and glory. Father, thank you so much for revealing your Son to us, revealing your love. Father, the Son is your heart given to us. We are so grateful, we are so thankful for even these first three chapters of the Gospel of John—for proclaiming to us that you, our Father in heaven, so loved the world that you gave your only beloved Son so that we would not have to die but that we could have life, so that we could have you, so that we could know that you know us, that we matter to you. Thank you so much. Thank you so, so much. Help us. Help us to receive that gift. Father, you gave and you gave, and you keep giving. Help us to receive this gift with everything we are and everything we have. In the mighty name of the gift, in the mighty name of the One who was given, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

As you begin this first Messianic checkpoint, take some time in prayer to thank the Father for sending his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, as the Savior of the world and the Lamb of God. Ask Jesus to reveal himself to you through the Gospel of John.

DAY 100: This Is My Body

Reflect on the **Word**

Jesus makes it clear in John 6:51 that he is the living bread that has come down from heaven and that anyone who eats of this bread will live forever. Here, Jesus makes a connection with the Lamb of God. When the people ate the flesh of the lamb, they were given freedom and life—and if they eat the bread of heaven, which is his flesh, they will have freedom and life.

- Some claim that Jesus is just speaking symbolically. But he could have corrected any misunderstanding if he meant his words to be understood symbolically. Instead, he reiterates the truth that only those who eat his flesh and drink his blood have eternal life.
- At the Last Supper, Jesus does not take bread and wine and say this is *like* his body and blood. He says, "This *is* my body … this *is* my blood" (Matthew 26:26, 28, emphasis added).
- In Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, we see how important it is for God's people to worship him correctly. Here, Jesus makes it clear how he wants us to worship him—by eating his flesh and drinking his blood in the Holy Eucharist.
- Many cannot accept this teaching and walk away. Jesus asks his apostles if they also will leave him. Simon Peter responds, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). In other words, Peter does not fully understand, but he has faith in Jesus.
- For more than 1,500 years, every Christian believed in the Eucharist as the true Body and Blood of Christ. If this teaching is wrong, then every Christian was guilty of idolatry, and Catholics and Orthodox Christians are guilty of idolatry today. Recall how quickly God put a stop to the worship of the golden calf on Mount Sinai. Would God have allowed Christians to idolatrously worship mere bread and wine since the beginning of the Church?

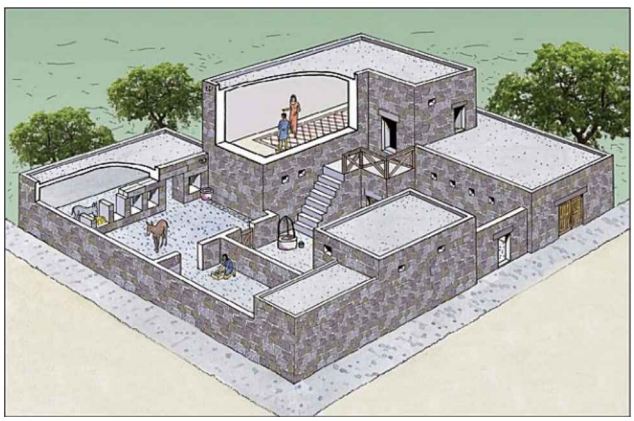
Today, go to a Catholic church and kneel in front of the tabernacle, where the Eucharistic presence of the Lord is reserved. Ask yourself whether you will "walk away" from him like so many did or if, like Peter, you can say, "Lord, to whom can I go? You have the words of eternal life." Jesus is asking you to put your faith in his Word even more today.

John 4–6, Proverbs 5:7-14

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise and glory. Lord God, I just thank you so much. Thank you so much, God, for the gift of calling the Samaritan woman that she can have hope in her life. Thank you so much, Father, for the gift of revealing your love and who you are. You have the authority to tell a paralyzed person, someone who had suffered for thirty-eight years, to rise and walk. Lord God, thank you so much for revealing that you are equal to the Father, and yet you have the humility of only doing what the Father asks. And Jesus, thank you so much for the gift of yourself in the Eucharist. It's a gift that we cannot fathom and we can never thank you for enough. Receive our thanks, Lord God, today and every day. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**



CAPERNAUM HOUSE

This drawing shows what a typical house in Capernaum in the time of Jesus looked like. The main living quarters were upstairs, while other rooms were used for storage and work. In one corner, animals were kept overnight.

DAY 101: Signs and Wonders

Reflect on the **Word**

Proverbs 5 gives advice to a son about the kind of woman he should marry. It is also general advice regarding the kind of people with whom we should associate. We should spend time with those who have depth of character.

- As we see in the final verse of Proverbs 5, a person can die due to lack of discipline.
- At times, many of us may be unwilling to take up our crosses and follow Jesus. We hesitate to do what is difficult.
- In John's Gospel, Jesus' miracles are referred to as "signs." A sign points to something—in this case, to Jesus' identity.

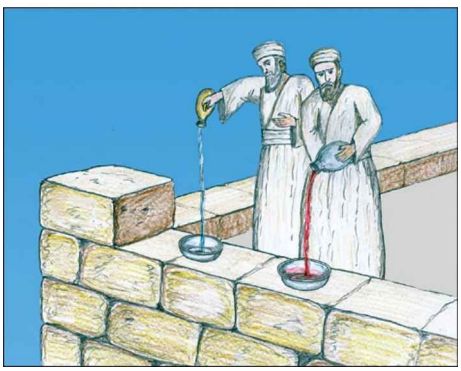
  In John 8:58, Jesus says to the Pharisees, "Before Abraham was, I am." Here, Jesus makes it clear that he is more than just another prophet. He is saying he is equal to God himself.
- This groundbreaking truth that Jesus is not merely a prophet—that he is the divine Son of God, one with the Father—is shown when he performs miracles.
- Anyone can claim to be the Messiah; Jesus says who he is and proves it by the signs he performs.
- Ask the Lord to help you see him as he is—and believe what you see. Let the Scriptures shape you so that his word may be accomplished in your life.

John 7–9, Proverbs 5:15-23

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we thank you, and we give you praise today and every day. Father, you have given us your Son, and you have given us a share in your nature. You have given us the Holy Spirit, the promised Holy Spirit that your Son promised to those who would follow him. Please pour out your Holy Spirit upon us once again, in the name of Jesus, so that our hearts may be opened to the fire of your love and our minds may be opened to your truth of who you are and who you are calling us to be. Lord God, help us to not ever, ever be blind—the spiritual blindness that can affect every single one of us, where we refuse to see or we choose not to see—where we get to the place where we would just rather not look and see the truth, acknowledge the truth, and therefore be convicted by the truth. Lord God, help us always. Give us the strength. Give us the strength to have the courage to have open eyes in this world. Give us the strength to be able to be convicted by what we see. Convicted to act. Convicted to repent. Convicted to love those who are not loved and to fulfill the promises that we have made. We make this prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**



WATER LIBATION CEREMONY

Associated with the Feast of Tabernacles, or Booths, was a daily ceremony of water drawing. A priest carried water from the Siloam Pool to the Temple and was joined at the altar by another priest carrying wine.

DAY 102: The Death of Lazarus

Reflect on the **Word**

As the "sheep" of Jesus' flock, we have an Enemy, who seeks to kill, steal, and destroy. But Jesus comes that we may have abundant life (see John 10:10). This is the Good News.

- In fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, Jesus comes to save not only the Jews but also all people of every nation. The promise the Lord made in his covenant with Abraham, which extended through Moses and David to Jesus, expands through the Church for the salvation of the entire world. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, desires to bring every nation into one family, one kingdom—one flock.
- The raising of Lazarus in John 11 shows Jesus allowing himself to be vulnerable: "Jesus wept" (John 11:35). Though Jesus knows he will shortly bring Lazarus back from the dead, he feels the grief of those present and shares it with them.
- Jesus reveals that he can raise the dead by the power of his word. Even in seemingly hopeless circumstances, Jesus can step in and show that it is not over yet. In Jesus, there is always hope.

  With everything he says and does, Jesus shows that he cannot be just a holy man or prophet; he must be the divine Son of God.
- Now that Jesus has shown us who he is, what is our response?

  Let us pray this prayer: *Jesus, if you are who you say you are, then I am who you say I am. And you say that I am yours. So let me be yours.*

John 10–12, Proverbs 6:1-5

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise. We give you glory. Father, we get to hear how the Son of God, Jesus Christ, speaks to you—how he calls you "Father," how he calls you "Abba," how he calls you "Dad." And because he has given us your Spirit, you also are made into our dad, and we—as your sons and daughters—we come before you now, Dad, and we say thank you. We praise you, Dad, our God and Father. You are good. Help us. Help us to live as your sons and daughters every moment of every day of our lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

***Who are** the different "Marys" in John's Gospel?*

The name *Mary* is the English form of the Hebrew name *Myriam*. It was a common girl's name in the first century. The "first" Mary is, of course, the mother of Jesus and the wife of Joseph—the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Another Mary is from the Galilean village of Magdala, known as Mary Magdalene, who becomes a follower of Jesus after a troubled life marked by demonic possession. (Note that nowhere in the Bible does it say that she was a prostitute. This is a popular misconception.) Mary Magdalene stands at the foot of the Cross along with Mary the mother of Jesus. Then, there is Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, who figures prominently in the episode of Jesus' raising Lazarus from the dead. She loves to sit at the feet of Jesus and hear him teach (see Luke 10:38-42). A "fourth" Mary in the Gospel of John is Mary the wife of Clopas, who also stands with the other Marys at the Cross in John 19:25.

–Lavinia Spirito

DAY 103: Judas' Secrecy

Reflect on the **Word**

When Jesus washes the feet of his apostles, he shows that no servant is greater than his master. He calls his disciples to serve others as he has served them. He says, "The Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28).

- Judas was given the responsibility of distributing money to the poor and buying what was needed. Yet he was living a secret life as he followed Jesus.
- If Judas had turned to Jesus or one of the other apostles and shared his struggles, things could have turned out differently.
- Here, Peter's denial is foretold—even when he seems so sure of himself, saying, "Lord, I will lay down my life for you." Jesus tells Peter that he is weaker than he realizes; before the sun comes up, he will deny that he even knows Jesus three times (see Matthew 26:34 and John 18:12-27).
- Jesus promises his apostles that he will prepare a place for them and send the Holy Spirit. These are the arms of the Father reaching out to embrace us, one arm being the Son and the other being the Holy Spirit. We have the choice of whether or not we want to live in that embrace.
- God says we can do *nothing* without him. In him, though, we can do *all* things. In all of our struggles, we are called to abide in the heart of Jesus.
- In our weakness, we might betray the love of Jesus, like Judas, or deny him in our actions, like Peter. When we find ourselves betraying or denying the Lord, we need to seek his forgiveness and ask for the grace that will bring us back to him.

John 13–15, Proverbs 6:6-11

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise. Father, we thank you. You are our good dad, and because Jesus Christ the Redeemer has sent the Consoler, the Spirit of Truth, into our hearts, we can call you Dad—because you look at us and you call us your sons and your daughters. And so this day we praise you, and we give you thanks. This day we also come to you with our needs because we know that you are a good dad. And you see us in the midst of our needs, and you come to us with your help. Father in heaven, help us to never have mercenary hearts that just come to you when we need. But help us to have hearts like yours, hearts like your Son, hearts like Jesus, where we love you in the midst of all seasons and all circumstances, where there is nothing that can stop us from doing your will. And nothing that can stop us from abiding in the presence and in the heart—in the grace—of your Son, Jesus. Help us to abide in you this day and every day. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Even those who were closest to Jesus sinned and struggled to abide in the heart of Jesus. When we find ourselves betraying, denying, or disobeying God, we need to seek his forgiveness and ask for the grace that will bring us back to him. Today, hand over those areas of your life where you struggle, and seek God's forgiveness and grace. He is not outdone in mercy!

DAY 104: The Priestly Prayer of Jesus

Reflect on the **Word**

Jesus makes it clear that his followers will have trouble in this world but that they should be untroubled: "In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

- Jesus does not promise a life free from suffering. During his public ministry, he faces derision, humiliation, and pain—ultimately, the loss of everything except his Father.
- He prays for all of his disciples, both the disciples with him during his public ministry and all who will come to believe through their words. In other words, he is praying for you and me.
- Jesus is betrayed and handed over to Pilate, who asks him, "What is truth?" (John 18:38). This is a pertinent question for our relativistic age. Today, many say, "You have your truth, and I have mine." Jesus challenges this notion, saying that everyone who hears his voice hears the truth.
- While Jesus says that he has come to gather the lost sheep of the house of Israel, he makes it clear that his saving mission is for people of every nation.
- In John 1, we hear that the Word—Jesus—comes among his own people but they do not receive him. During Jesus' passion, his own people choose Barabbas, a murderer, over him.

Today, we pray that Jesus will help us choose him at every moment: *Lord, help us to draw close to you. You endured humiliation, suffering, and crucifixion for the Father's glory and for the sake of our salvation. May we never let it go to waste in us.*

John 16–18, Proverbs 6:12-15

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we thank you. Thank you for your Word. Thank you for allowing us to hear the prayer of the Son to you, Father, on the night he was betrayed, on the night he was denied, on the night he was handed over to his enemies—to those who mocked and falsely accused and ultimately killed him. On this night, Father, in your Word, you give us a picture of how your Son spoke with you. How much he not only loves you, but how much he loves those who are his own in the world. Father, thank you so much for giving us access to the Son's prayer. Thank you for allowing us to be the ones he prayed for. And, Father, we just ask that you please show your heart to us and the heart of your Son who is so humbled and humiliated that he is willing to be exchanged with a robber, for our sake. He is willing to take the place of the guilty, even as he is guiltless. Help us to know this more and more deeply. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Continue to pray that Jesus will help you to choose him at every moment. Pray from your heart, or use these words: *Lord, help us to draw close to you. You endured humiliation, suffering, and crucifixion for the Father's glory and for the sake of our salvation. May we never let it go to waste in us.*

DAY 105: It Is Finished

Reflect on the **Word**

Though Pilate finds him not guilty, he orders Jesus to be tortured and then sentences him to death. Pilate says, "I find no crime in him" (John 19:4); Jesus is the spotless Lamb of God.

- Just as none of the sacrificial lambs' bones are broken, none of Jesus' bones are broken on the Cross.
- If we had witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus, we would not have seen Jesus as a sacrifice but as a criminal being executed. But no one takes Jesus' life from him; he lays it down freely to take away the sins of the world (see John 10:18). Jesus is the eternal high priest who offers himself, the Lamb of God, in sacrifice to the glory of God the Father. At Calvary, Jesus is both priest and sacrificial offering.
- When Jesus sees his mother at the foot of the Cross, he says, "Woman, behold, your son!" Here, he refers to St. John the Apostle, to whom he says, "Behold, your mother" (John 19:26-27). In these words, he is telling all his disciples to take Mary in their hearts as their mother.
- Later, the risen Jesus bestows the Holy Spirit upon the apostles, saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:22-23). It is clear, then, that Jesus gives the apostles the authority to forgive sins.
- When Jesus asks Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" (John 21:15), he first uses a Greek word related to *agape*—self-sacrificial, unconditional love. When Peter responds that he loves Jesus, he uses a word related to *philia*—brotherly, friendship love. The third time Jesus asks Peter, he switches to *philia* also. Jesus wants us to love him like he loves us, but even when we do not, he meets us where we are, and he accepts our love.
- When we come back to Jesus, he restores us. Peter betrayed and denied him. But Jesus indicates that he will restore him as he tells him, "Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep."

This is a word of hope for us. When we feel like all is lost because of a mess we have made, we can come back to Jesus.

John 19–21, Proverbs 6:16-22

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we thank you. Lord, thank you so much, not only for the gift of the sacrifice of your Son, who laid down his life—it was not taken from him; he laid it down of his own accord. Thank you so much for the gift of your Son, who came into this world not to condemn the world but to save the world. And this is how he has saved the world: by laying down his life for his friends and laying down his life for his enemies so that we could become friends; in rising from the dead, Lord God; in appearing to the disciples and speaking that powerful word shalom*, that powerful word "peace." Peace which the world cannot give he has given to us, as he gave to the disciples. The ability to forgive sins, the restoration of the kingdom, and his Holy Spirit that dwells inside of us. Father, thank you. We can never stop thanking you. We will never stop thanking you. In Jesus' name, we thank you. Amen.*

Dive **Deeper**

As he does with Peter, Jesus meets us where we are—even when we do not love him like he loves us. Today, spend some time in prayer meditating on the exchange between Peter and Jesus. How would you answer if Jesus asked *you*, "Do you love me?"

REVIEW: Messianic Checkpoint #1 – Gospel of John

Gospel of John **Recap**

The passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus guarantees that things will work out according to God's will, regardless of whatever circumstances we find ourselves in. When we think there is no hope, suddenly the light of Christ shines in the darkness, and we see God for who he really is.

Gospel of John **Review Questions**

Use these questions to test your knowledge of the checkpoint you just finished. Answers are below. No matter how many you can answer, celebrate the accomplishment of finishing this checkpoint!

1. Who did the people think that John the Baptist was?
2. When John the Baptist saw Jesus, what did he say?
3. Who is Simon Peter's brother?
4. In which city did Jesus perform his first miracle? What was that miracle?
5. Who was the Jewish leader who secretly met with Jesus?
6. Jesus met a woman at a well, who later said to her neighbors, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did." What nationality was this woman?
7. Who was the woman who stood outside Jesus' tomb?
8. When the resurrected Jesus appeared to his disciples at Lake Tiberias (or, the Sea of Tiberias), how many fish did they catch?

1. Elijah or a prophet

2. "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

3. Andrew

4. Cana, changing water into wine

5. Nicodemus

6. A Samaritan

7. Mary Magdalene

8. 153

Purple is the color of the **ROYAL KINGDOM** time period because it is the color of royalty.

Key **Events & Figures**

The period of the Judges is a long, repeating cycle of disappointment that ends with Israel asking the prophet Samuel for a king. God grants their request, naming Saul as their first king. In the end, Saul ends up being replaced due to his disobedience to the Lord.

Saul is succeeded by David, a young man from Bethlehem. God makes a covenant with David that will ultimately be fulfilled in Jesus, who is from his line of descendants. While David wants to build a permanent temple in Jerusalem, the task falls to his son Solomon, who is renowned for his wisdom. Saul united the kingdom, David expands it, and Solomon builds the Temple. The people, though, become disillusioned.

What **Changes?**

The period of the Royal Kingdom, much like Egypt and Exodus, brings significant changes for the people of God. They now have a king like all the other nations, but the king is called to lead and rule as God's sovereign. Jerusalem will become the permanent place where God will place his name.

After Jerusalem is established as the capital of a united nation, unrest begins to grow among the ten northern tribes about the way they are being treated by the king. This grumbling will soon become a movement that will have drastic consequences following Solomon's death.

The books of Psalms and Proverbs are written during this period.

DAY 106: Saul Is Chosen

Reflect on the **Word**

One does not need to indulge sexual appetites, so fornication and adultery are always condemned.

- How often do we sin in seeking things we do not even need? This shows our brokenness. We must always ask the Lord for his mercy and forgiveness, as well as for reconciliation and healing, so we can avoid these sins in the future.
- We are introduced to Saul, who is said to be the most handsome man in Israel. He is unusually tall and looks like a warrior. The role of a king is both to fight for and to unite his people.
- Saul suffers from a common affliction: he is overly concerned with what other people think of him, making him incapable of being a truly great king. Saul should not be seen as an evil character, however. He makes many good and noble decisions, fulfilling the Lord's commands in many respects.
- When Samuel anoints Saul, he says that the Spirit of God will come upon him and make him a new creation. This is what happens in Baptism: through water and anointing, we are made new in the Holy Spirit and are anointed to share in Christ's threefold ministry as priest, prophet, and king.
- We can identify with Saul. Even though he is not the most heroic of characters, he is not thoroughly corrupt. Like many of us, he is wounded and cares too much about what other people think. Let us pray today that we may live in the Spirit and be motivated more by God's will than the opinions of others.

1 Samuel 9–10, Proverbs 6:23-35

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise and thanks. Thank you for this day. Thank you for day 106. Thank you for leading us by your Spirit to hear your Word once again, to go into this new stage of the Royal Kingdom and to see the beginnings of how you not only blessed the twelve tribes of Israel, but you brought them together. And this is the beginning of your bringing them together into a royal kingdom, and you have done this in order to bless us. You have done this in order to prefigure the Church that you founded in Jesus Christ. You gave us your Holy Spirit, that same Spirit that came upon Saul, son of Kish, to lead him and to guide him so he could be a prophet, so he could be a king, so he could lead, so he could fight the enemies of the people of Israel. So he could unite the people of Israel. You have given us this same Spirit, your same Holy Spirit. So right now, Lord, we just give you thanks, and we ask that you please renew the gift of your Spirit in each one of us. Let us always say yes to you in everything that we are and in everything that we do. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

What gifts do you need in order to fulfill the vocation God has called you to live? What struggles do you have in fulfilling that vocation? Take these questions to prayer today and ask for God's help in answering his call for you.

DAY 107: Samuel's Speech

Reflect on the **Word**

Saul unites the people, saying that everyone who belongs to Israel will fight against Nahash the Ammonite. He rallies them, demonstrating that he is a leader and possesses the Spirit of God. Saul was anointed king by Samuel. Now he leads his people to victory.

- Some advocate killing all those who opposed Saul, but he lets them go and renews the kingdom by sacrificing peace offerings. In this decision, he shows great restraint and wisdom.
- As Samuel recounts, God leads Israel. When his people cried out to him as slaves in Egypt, the Lord sent Moses and Aaron to deliver them. Then, in the desert, when they cried out, God delivered them from their enemies.

  God has always taken care of his people in their need, but now they want a king like other nations. While this is not what God wants—he himself wants to be their King—he grants their request due to the hardness of their hearts.

  Similarly, God permits all of the battles Israel needs to fight, although this is not part of his original plan.
- God's call is always "higher," but he sometimes allows us to stay "lower" if we choose. It is better to set our minds and hearts "on the heights"—on God's will for our lives.
- Through Samuel, the Lord promises that he will bless the people only if both they and their king are faithful to him.

  This is what conversion is all about: recognizing our brokenness and our need for God's grace. He offers us his mercy and forgiveness, but he commands us to sin no more.

1 Samuel 11–12, Psalm 55

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we do trust in you. We give you thanks. Lord God, even in the midst of not just enemies but friends who have failed us, friends who have betrayed us—even in the midst of love that has run out, people who have promised, who have made covenants to us and promises to us and then failed to live up to those promises and broken those covenants—we know that you are faithful. And you love us. And you fight for us. And you never break your promise. And you never break your covenant. And so we give you thanks. You delight in us, and you love us, and you choose us, and you sustain us. And so we thank you, and we love you back. Help us to receive your love more and more this day and every day. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Even when we make mistakes, God is still with us. Today in prayer, take some time to recognize your brokenness and your need for God's grace. Let him speak these words to you: *I'm present to you. I can heal you. I can restore you. Now let's move forward together.*

DAY 108: Saul's Vanity

Reflect on the **Word**

The Philistine army dwarfs that of Israel. Samuel has promised to come to Saul in seven days to offer sacrifice, but he does not. The people are scattering, and Saul begins to falter. Preoccupied as always with the opinions of others, Saul decides to offer the sacrifice rather than wait for Samuel.

- As soon as Saul is finished offering the sacrifice, Samuel arrives. He says that because Saul disobeyed the Lord's command, his kingship will end, and his successor will come from another family.
- Although Saul is vain, he still has strengths. Rather than give up, he continues to fight against the Philistines on behalf of the people of Israel. He does not abandon the people or the Lord, even after learning that he will have no kingly dynasty.
- Samuel says that Saul's successor will be "a man after God's own heart."
- Saul continues to fight, but he seems to be driven by vanity and the need to succeed. He is a complex character.
- Since all of us are complex people, we can see some of ourselves in Saul. Hopefully, we can see ourselves also in the goodness and bravery of Jonathan.

1 Samuel 13–14, Psalm 58

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, you are good, and you are just. You are a good and just judge. You are a good and just judge who knows the secrets of our hearts. You know the decisions of our wills. You know our actions that we make. And you know the secrets in our minds and in our hearts. You know what's hidden from everyone else, even from ourselves, Lord. You know us through and through. And we ask you to be a good and just judge. We also ask you to be a merciful judge. We know our own brokenness, and there is so much for our own selves we don't even know. But you do, God. Nothing that we are, nothing that we do escapes you. And you still continue to choose us. You still continue to guide and guard us. And so this day, Lord God, please guide, and this day, Lord God, please guard. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Saul struggled with vanity, caring too much about the opinions of others. This attitude is prevalent in our culture. Today, watch Fr. Mike's Ascension Presents video called "This Is the Christian Solution to Vanity" to learn more about the sin of vanity and how to overcome it.

DAY 109: A Heart of Obedience

Reflect on the **Word**

Recall that Saul's weakness is his inordinate preoccupation with how others view him. This is the sin of vanity, which is more than simply an obsession with one's physical appearance.

- While we should care to some degree about what others think of us, we cannot let this become our primary motive for how we act. We cannot let this become vanity.
- The Lord has told Saul to have Israel destroy all the flocks and herds of the Amalekites, but the people refuse. They decide to destroy only what they do not want, keep the good things, and give God some of these things. As Samuel says, though, the Lord desires obedience to his voice more than burnt offerings and sacrifices.

  Obedience to the will of God is the heart of holiness.
- Because of Saul's disobedience, the Spirit of God departs from Saul, leading to disaster.
- Samuel has told Saul, "The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14). When Samuel goes to Jesse, he sees that Jesse's oldest son is tall and handsome, just like Saul. But God sees his heart and rejects him.
- Remember that God does not judge by appearance but by our hearts. The Lord desires an obedient heart, a heart that wants what he wants.
- This is what it means to have "a heart after God's heart." It can be difficult. To listen to him and understand what he wants us to do, particularly when we would rather be doing other things, we need the help of his grace.

1 Samuel 15–16, Psalm 61

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise and thanks. We just give you glory today. And we just honor you for who you are and all that you've done. We give you thanks, not only for calling us to be yours, but also for being so patient with us even in our disobedience, Lord. There are consequences to our sins. There are consequences to us saying no. And yet, you continue to give us mercy. You continue to restore us. You continue to be with us. In our weakness, you are strong. In our faithlessness, you are faithful. And so we praise you, and we honor you, and we love you. Thank you so much. May you be praised, glorified, and loved all the more. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

What does it mean *that "an evil spirit from the* LORD *" haunted Saul?*

1 Samuel 16:14 says, "The Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him." Because of Saul's disobedience to God—offering sacrifice without Samuel present and failing to wipe out the Amalekites—the Lord removes his Spirit from Saul, and ultimately the kingdom is handed over to David.

Saul's psychological and emotional state changes after he is disobedient to God. The phrase "evil spirit" used here does not necessarily mean a "wicked" or "demonic" spirit. In this context, it is better understood as a "downcast" or "gloomy" spirit. Saul's disposition becomes downcast due to his disobedience. When the Lord removes his Spirit from Saul, there is a void that is filled with Saul's own misery.

When the blessing of God is removed due to disobedience, a negative state is the usual result. In contrast, when one is obedient to God, peace and a sound mind generally follow.

–Jeff Cavins

DAY 110: David and Goliath

Reflect on the **Word**

David hears the challenge from Goliath and is determined that someone needs to fight him. With great boldness and courage, David says to Saul, "Do not let your heart fail because of Goliath."

- Saul responds that Goliath has been a warrior from his youth. Since David is so young, Saul says that he cannot possibly defeat Goliath. But David describes how he has defended his sheep against lions and bears.
- David has been training to fight simply by doing his father Jesse's will. Jesse has sent David to guard the flocks, putting his life on the line, and this has prepared him to fight Goliath.
- We do not know the battles we will face in the future. When we are obedient to the tasks God gives us in the present, we are preparing for future battles.
- Saul offers David his own armor and sword, but David is not used to them. So he goes to fight with his sling and staff.

When Goliath draws near, David runs quickly to meet him. Sometimes, we hesitate in doing what is right in the moment. We should ask the Lord when he wants us to wait and when he wants us to "race into battle."

David is a man after God's own heart; he does not fight to win prizes or gain glory. He fights because Goliath has insulted the name of the living God. David defends the honor of the Lord.

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise, and we give you glory and honor. We just give you thanks. Thank you, God, for all that you have given to us—the very fact that our existence comes from you. You are the ground of all being, Father in heaven. You are the source of everything. You are being itself. Just the fact that we get to exist is because you share your being with us. You share the gift of existing with us. If you were to forget us for a moment, Lord God, we would cease to exist. So thank you. Thank you for remembering us at all times. Thank you for holding us in existence at all times. Thank you for being so faithful and for being such a good dad. Help us to not forget you. Help us to remember you and remember your love, remember your faithfulness. Help us to walk in faithfulness as we walk in thankfulness as well this day. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

VALLEY OF ELAH

This is a south-facing view of the Elah Valley, where the battle between David and Goliath took place. A modern road runs through the center of the valley near the riverbed from which David took five stones. (See 1 Samuel 17.)

DAY 111: Saul Tries to Kill David

Reflect on the **Word**

David and Jonathan make a covenant with one another. The relationship between David and Jonathan is one of the greatest examples of friendship in Scripture. The highest form of friendship is based on virtue—a virtuous friendship.

- There are many examples in the early Church of saints who form deep friendships because of their mutual devotion to Christ. It is powerful to discover that someone else is captivated by the same thing—or person—that has captivated you. This is the foundation of a virtuous friendship.
- We might expect Jonathan to be jealous of David, since Jonathan would have received the crown after the death of his father, Saul. But he knows that the Lord has distinct plans for David and him, so he does not see David as a threat. Jonathan understands that it is not God's plan for him to be the king.
- As Saul travels to the different cities around Israel, he hears the people singing that he slays thousands and David slays "ten thousands." Here, his vanity flares up and he becomes angry.

  How do we escape being overly concerned with others' opinions? We need to remember that only what God thinks of us really matters.
- In his envy and bitterness, Saul tries to kill David several times. So David is on the run from Saul, but whenever he is given the opportunity, he responds with mercy and forgiveness.
- This theme connects with Psalm 59, a prayer for deliverance from one's enemies. David has been elevated with the promise of kingship, but he must constantly be on guard while Saul pursues him. As he prays for protection, he offers praise to the Lord.
- We can follow David's example in this. As we offer petitions to the Lord and intercede for others and ourselves, we should praise him. We praise him before the battle is won—while we are in the midst of the struggle.

1 Samuel 18–19, *Psalm 59*

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise and glory. We give you praise for deliverance. We give you praise in the midst of the battle. This is how we love you: by obeying your commandments, of course, and by seeking your face and by striving to be men and women after your own heart—but also by praising you in the midst of the battle, by praising you in the midst of uncertainty, by praising you, in giving you thanks, even before you have delivered us. Even before you have come to our rescue, Lord God, we lift up your name. So, please, in our small way of lifting up our voice and directing our heart to you and our thanksgiving to you, let that be a gift to you today, God. Please, in the name of your Son, please receive our words of praise. Receive our words of thanksgiving and be glorified, for you are glory itself. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Today, like David, praise God in the midst of any struggles or battles you are facing and ask for his strength and his grace.

DAY 112: True Friendship

Reflect on the **Word**

Scripture makes clear that David and Jonathan love one another. Their love is not disordered, however—it is *philia*, a true friendship love.

- C. S. Lewis describes four kinds of love in his book *The Four Loves*. The first is *storge*, an affectionate type of love. Everyone experiences affection. Another is *eros*—a love of desire. Although *eros* in itself is good, it can be easily distorted. We have seen a third type of love—*philia*, a true, virtuous friendship love. This is a "brotherly" love.
- In *philia*, friends pursue something bigger than themselves. They pursue a virtuous relationship that can endure, whereas *storge* and *eros* may not.

  In 1 Samuel, we see this type of love reflected in the brotherhood between David and Jonathan. They are united in their pursuit of honoring Israel and seeking the glory of God.
- David and Jonathan recognize this virtue in each other, so they love each other and help each other in a particular way.
- In 1 Samuel 20, as they weep in their goodbyes, we see a love that we may not entirely understand. We might never have experienced *philia* like this.

  If you have experienced *philia*, then you know its power. *Philia* is closest to a fourth kind of love, *agape*—sacrificial, divine love. *Agape* has become a reality for Christians through the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

  All the loves come to perfection in the person of Jesus Christ, who loves us to the point of death, calls us his friends, and gives us his Spirit.

1 Samuel 20, *Psalm 142*

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise and glory. We thank you so much. Thank you for your word. Thank you for the gift of friendship. Lord God, we see a true friendship between Jonathan and David. We give you thanks for all the people in our lives, whether they be few or great in number, who have been loyal to us, who have been faithful to us—that you have brought into our lives and have cared for us or protected us or even just done their best to be a friend. Lord God, at this moment we pray for all of them. We pray for every person who has ever loved us, even those who have not loved us like they should have. We lift them up to you right now. Lord God, in this moment we also lift up before you every heart that is lonely, every heart that is isolated, every heart that does not and has not known friendship. We pray for all of those hearts that experience this life and are walking through this world as a lonely journey, as a lonely experience, as the experience of one who remains unseen and unknown and unloved. They are our brothers and sisters, and they are with us right now. As we go through this Bible in a Year*, Lord God, we pray for them right now. And we pray for them in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

Dive **Deeper**

After learning more about the four kinds of love today, think about how they relate to your relationships and how you can love those in your life better. If you want to learn more about the four loves, watch Fr. Mike's Ascension Presents video "Why Love Is More Than a Feeling."

DAY 113: Broken Trust

Reflect on the **Word**

Doeg the Edomite betrays Ahimelech and the priests, but David responds with Psalm 52.

- David prays for justice, committing himself to walk in righteousness even in the midst of dishonest and evil people.
- In his *Inferno,* Dante places traitors at the deepest level of hell. Judas is one of the figures portrayed in this circle of hell, along with Lucifer and other deceivers.
- The bread of the presence is a sign of how God, out of love, fed the people of Israel in their desert wanderings.
- At every Mass, the priest elevates the true bread of the presence, the Eucharist, saying, "Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb."
- David eats the bread of the presence so that he has the strength to continue the fight and flee from Saul, who is unjustly pursuing him.
- We always need to remember that God loves us and desires to make our hearts his own. Sometimes it is hard to trust when we have been hurt by the betrayal of others, but we can always trust the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

1 Samuel 21–22, *Psalm 52*

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise today. And we know what it is like to be betrayed. We know what it is to be lied about. We know what it is to lose faith in others when they have turned their backs on us. We know what it is to be hurt by having trusted others, having given our hearts to them, and having those hearts be betrayed. And so we recognize in David's prayer, in this Psalm 52—we recognize our own experience. We recognize our own hearts. We recognize what it is to be abandoned, to have had friends and then to have those friends turn on us. And so we pray for each other, especially those betrayed hearts, especially those who find themselves wounded by those they thought they could trust. Lord God, we pray for all of our friends right now who have been wounded by friends, all those people who are joining us in this community who have been wounded by those they believed they could trust. And we ask for their strength, for grace, and for mercy to be in their hearts. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

If you have experienced betrayal in your past, bring that experience to prayer today and pray for those who have hurt you. Pray for healing for all of God's people.

DAY 114: David Saves Keilah

Reflect on the **Word**

Here, David saves the city of Keilah from the Philistines. He asks the Lord for guidance. While he takes into account the wisdom of those around him, he consults the Lord.

- We should always turn to the Bible and the Church's teachings when we discern a course of action. We should also consider the wisdom of those around us because the Lord can speak through them as well.
- David's action gives us great insight into his heart. He is showing that he is truly a man after God's own heart by appealing to the Lord for direction.
- The Ziphites betray David by informing Saul of his presence. Saul and his army are on one side of the hill, while David and his army are on the other. Then Saul hears that the Philistines are attacking, and so he has to return and leave David.
- God's protection of David in this instance reminds us of all the ways he is working of which we are unaware. Many times difficult things happen to us and those we love, but we do not know how many times the Lord delivered us from harm.
- In heaven, we will see all the moments that could have been catastrophes but were not, due to God's actions. God remains close to us in his mysterious will. Even when we cannot sense him, his hand is outstretched to us whenever we appeal to him for his guidance and aid.

1 Samuel 23, *Psalm 54*

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise and glory. We thank you. We thank you for the fact that you are just and you are good and you continually speak to us, Lord God. And sometimes in our prayer you are quiet. Sometimes in our prayer we ask for a specific answer and you are silent. And you don't speak in the way that we would prefer. But, Lord God, you continue to speak. You continue to speak to us through your Word. You continue to speak to us every single day that we press play and just allow your Word to reach our ears and allow your Word to touch and transform our hearts. And so this day, just like David, we ask for your guidance. We ask for your will to be made known not only in Sacred Scripture, Lord God, not only through the Church, but also in our prayer. We ask this, please. And also in the people around us, we ask that in everything your will is done, in everything you are glorified. And we give you praise and glory right now. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

EN-GEDI

David stayed in the wilderness near En-gedi to keep away from Saul. This is a close-up view of one of the pools of En-gedi, which could have provided water for David and his men. (See 1 Samuel 23:29.)

DAY 115: King Saul Is Spared

Reflect on the **Word**

David spares the life of Saul. David knows that God has chosen and anointed Saul. He still is the king, with the duty to fight for the people of Israel against their enemies.

- God can give and take kingship from anyone he wants, but David is not God. He cannot kill the Lord's anointed. God has not given him that job. Though God has told him he will be Saul's successor as king, David recognizes his own limits.
- At times, we might be tempted to overextend our reach into battles that God has not asked us to fight.
- Being aware of our limitations is not the same thing as limiting ourselves. David never shrinks back from a battle, and neither does Jonathan. But he seeks the Lord's guidance first.
- When Keilah was attacked by the Philistines, David prayed, "God, is this the battle you want me to fight?" David will only fight when the Lord wants him to.

There is nothing greater than being ready to do God's will at every moment.

- Pray that we fight only those battles to which the Lord is calling us. If we are being called to a battle we do not want to fight, let us ask God for his grace.

1 Samuel 24, *Psalm 57*

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise, and we lift your name up, and we thank you. We thank you even in the midst of trial. We thank you even in the midst of persecution. We have followed these stories of King David. He is being hunted. He's being hunted unfairly. He is being treated unfairly. We can see snapshots of our lives. We can see snapshots of when we have been victims of injustice, when we have been those who have experienced the evil of others, the evil decisions of other people. And so we, like David, give you praise even in the midst of the battle. We give you praise even in the midst of the struggle. We give you praise even in the midst of injustice, because you desire justice and you bid us to work for justice and you bid us to trust you, to praise you, and to belong to you. And so this day we reassert the fact that, Lord God, even when things are difficult and when things are dark, we are yours. And when things are a struggle and when things are a battle, that we fight in your name and we fight according to your plan and your will. May you be glorified this day and every day of our lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Ask for the Lord's guidance in the battles in your life. If God has called you to fight them, ask for his grace. If he has not called you to fight a specific battle, surrender to his will and hand it over to him.

DAY 116: David and Abigail

Reflect on the **Word**

David is not perfect. Though he is an Old Testament hero, who is portrayed as a type (or, figure) of the future Messiah, he has faults.

- The people following David see him as a just and upright leader. We often look to those who lead us to know how to act, and we benefit from just leaders.
- Abigail stands up to the evil in David's heart, demonstrating her wisdom and courage. David seeks revenge due to a personal insult. Abigail stands in David's way not only to protect Nabal's life but also to protect David from guilt.
- At certain times, nearly all of us have had people stand up to us and keep us from making a bad decision.
- We can benefit from the counsel of wise people around us, like Abigail. They can help us see which battles we should fight and which we should avoid.

We need to keep our hearts open to God and hear when he is speaking to us. As we listen to the counsel of those around us, we can discern whether the Lord is speaking through them and what the Lord wants us to do in each situation.

1 Samuel 25, *Psalm 63*

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise, and we give you honor. We thank you for all your ways. We thank you for the ways in which you send people to us, either to encourage us to holiness or to keep us from evil. We thank you for all those people, Lord, that have ever prayed for us, ever stood up for us, that ever stood up to us so that we can be called to greatness and be deterred from folly, deterred from evil. Lord God, we thank you for all the people that you have brought into our lives who encourage us to get close to you, and all those you have brought into our lives who encourage us to stay far, far away from what is wrong. Lord God, thank you for all the Abigails that you have brought into our lives, and may you be praised, and may they be blessed forever and ever. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

***Why did David** have multiple wives?*

In the Garden of Eden, it was made clear that God's original plan for humanity was a lifelong relationship between one man and one woman. For various reasons—primarily to increase the people of Israel—polygamy was permitted under the Law of Moses (see Exodus 21:10).

Kings would take more than one wife to cement political alliances with other nations or clans. So David had multiple wives, and Solomon famously had seven hundred wives (again, mostly for political reasons to consolidate his kingdom). The bitter fruit of polygamy was reaped in domestic discord, treachery, plotting, and murder, as we see in David's household, as well as in the rivalry between brothers competing for the throne.

–Lavinia Spirito

DAY 117: Reverence and Faithfulness

Reflect on the **Word**

When Saul was caught off guard by David and unable to defend himself, Saul repented of trying to kill David. Now Saul is again seeking to kill him.

- David has three prominent virtues: mercy, reverence, and faithfulness. Though his comrade Abishai says he could easily kill Saul with his spear, David knows it is not his job to kill the Lord's anointed.
- David hopes the Lord will treat him the way he has treated Saul. He says to Saul, "As your life was precious this day in my sight, so may my life be precious in the sight of the Lord" (1 Samuel 26:24).
- Here, we see a foreshadowing of the Our Father: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." David says, "As I am treating others, please, Lord, treat me"—that is, with mercy.

  We can see David's reverence in the reason why he preserves Saul's life—because Saul is the Lord's anointed. Though Saul is not living virtuously, David treats him with reverence because he belongs to God.

  David walks in faithfulness, which we see in his prayers and psalms. Though he does not know the next step or how God will deliver him, he remains faithful.
- In the midst of injustice, David says that he will continue to show mercy. Although Saul treats him like he is worthless, David will show him reverence. And although he does not know where this is leading, David will walk in faithfulness.
- We can learn from David's virtues. We can also learn from his imperfections and weaknesses. We too are often both virtuous and weak, faithful on some days and unfaithful on others.

1 Samuel 26, *Psalm 56*

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise, and we give you glory. We thank you for this day. We thank you for this brief time, briefer than normal, this time of just exposing ourselves to your Word and to hear your voice. Thank you for reminding us of the virtue of mercy. Thank you for reminding us of the virtue of reverence. Thank you for reminding us of the virtue of faithfulness. In your name, we ask you to please help us to be merciful, to be reverent, and to be faithful. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

What is one step you can take this week to grow in faith or make progress battling an area of weakness? Make a resolution to take that step, and ask for God's help.

DAY 118: King Saul Despairs

Reflect on the **Word**

Back in Israel's camp, Saul is feeling abandoned by God in his battle against the Philistines. He does what many of us do when God is silent—he turns to something else.

- In his desperation, Saul consults a medium in Endor to contact the spirit of the prophet Samuel. Necromancy is strictly forbidden in the Law of Moses and by the law of the Church.
- As the *Catechism* says, "God can reveal the future to his prophets or to other saints. Still, a sound Christian attitude consists in putting oneself confidently into the hands of Providence for whatever concerns the future" (CCC 2115).
- The task of the current moment is to prepare for the next moment. This requires us to trust in the Lord now without an "unhealthy curiosity" about the future, while still prudently preparing for it. (See CCC 2115.)
- All types of divination are wrong. They "conceal a desire for power over time" and "contradict the honor, respect, and loving fear that we owe to God alone." (See CCC 2116.)
- The Church does not simply condemn divination because it is superstitious and a waste of time; it condemns divination because it is spiritually dangerous. There is indeed a spiritual world, and not all spirits are good. When we involve ourselves in divination practices, we have recourse to something or someone other than God himself. This can open us up to the influence of the diabolical.
- If you have been involved in any divination practices, put them aside, repent of them, and confess them in the sacrament of Reconciliation. Divination is a serious violation of the first commandment, and it places the salvation of your soul in jeopardy.
- We need never have any fear of the future or seek to control it, because Jesus is Lord of all time. We simply need to place our trust in him.

1 Samuel 27–28, *Psalm 34*

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise, and we honor you today, and we thank you. Thank you for your goodness. Thank you for making us a body and soul. Thank you for giving us life and breath in this world that you have created, this world you have made good, this world that is good but is unsafe, this world that is good but has been broken—and these hearts of ours that are good but broken. Lord God, we ask you to come into the brokenness, because all those things that you make are good. Even though they have been broken, you still love us. Even though we are broken, you still love us. And even though this world is broken, you still love it, and you still can redeem it. You have redeemed it by the sacrifice, the life, the death, and the Resurrection of your Son. You have sent your Holy Spirit upon this world, this broken but good world, so that it may be holy, that we may be holy. Help us live a life consecrated to you this day and every day. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

Read more about what the Church teaches about divination in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2115–2117, and place your trust solely in God. If you have been involved in any of these practices, repent and go to confession to receive God's mercy.

DAY 119: David's Wisdom

Reflect on the **Word**

Psalm 18:19 says, "He brought me forth into a broad place; he delivered me, because he delighted in me." This is a powerful truth. When we allow the Lord to delight in us, things radically change. We do not need to earn the Lord's love; he already delights in us.

- When David arrives in Ziklag, he discovers that the Amalekites have raided his city and taken the people away. He then shows his wisdom in three ways.
- First, he asks God if he and his men should pursue the Amalekites to retrieve their families and belongings. In his time of need, the first thing David does is ask for direction from the Lord. He has learned that he should always pray first.

  Of his six hundred men, two hundred stop at the brook Besor to rest, guarding their possessions. Some of those who go on to battle do not want to share any of the spoils with the ones who stay behind. David says that all will share the spoils because all six hundred men served: four hundred by fighting, two hundred by guarding the baggage. This keeps his people united, aware that everyone serves a purpose.
- When David returns with the spoils, he sends presents to the elders of Judah. Saul has been killed, and David will soon be the next king of Israel. So these gifts to the elders show that he will be taking care of them.
- David has the heart of a king. He prays before he acts, he gives gifts justly, and he unites the tribes of Israel as one kingdom.

1 Samuel 29–31, *Psalm 18*

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you praise and glory. We thank you so much for this opportunity to listen to your Word and to see the end of Saul and to have followed him, the one who was anointed first, the one who was anointed by you and called and consecrated to be a king to fight for the people of Israel. And we are honored that you revealed not only the fact that you called Saul, but also the way in which our choices, even in the midst of being called, can either raise us up to you or can lead us away from you. Lord God, we just ask you to please help us to be people who have been anointed but say yes to you—people who have been chosen by you and then are faithful to you, because every one of us has a heart like Saul. Every one of us has a heart that can turn away, and we just ask you to please, please always keep us in your grasp. Always keep us near your heart and never let us wander away. Never let us die alone apart from you, but always allow us to walk with you and to die in you. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

***How does Saul** die?*

King Saul is overcome by the Philistines, and he knows that his wounds are mortal. Rather than dying at the hands of the Philistines, he asks his armor-bearer to kill him with his sword. But his armor-bearer refuses. "Therefore Saul took his own sword, and fell upon it" (1 Samuel 31:4).

In 2 Samuel 1, we read that an Amalekite comes to David with news about Saul's death. The man, attempting to gain favor with David, falsely claims to have killed Saul. The lying Amalekite's words displease David so much that they cost the man his life, for he has claimed to have killed the Lord's anointed.

There is no contradiction between the two accounts of Saul's death. In 1 Samuel 31, we read of the true account of the events as they unfolded, while 2 Samuel 1 reports the lie of the Amalekite.

–Jeff Cavins

DAY 120: David Mourns Saul

Reflect on the **Word**

1 Chronicles begins with a listing of many prominent biblical figures, including Adam, Seth, and Noah.

- Though there is no explicit mention of God here, he is directly involved in all their stories. These names mean something to us only because of what God has done through them.
- God can sometimes seem unnoticed in our lives, yet our lives matter because he is present.
- In 2 Samuel 1, David mourns the deaths of his enemy Saul and his dear friend Jonathan by singing a song of lamentation. David entreats the people of Israel to learn this song and sing it. David refuses to be held captive by the memory of Saul's animosity and jealousy. Rather, he honors Saul.

  The wounds of our pasts are real, but the freedom we have in Jesus is greater. We do not need to be held captive by the past or even by any present sorrow or pain. With God's grace, like David, we can move forward.

  This is not simply a matter of willpower; it is a matter of grace. Let us ask the Lord on behalf of one another to give us the grace to detach from enemies of the past and live in the freedom of the present.

2 Samuel 1, 1 Chronicles 1, Psalm 13

Take It to **Prayer**

Father in heaven, we give you thanks and praise. We thank you for all of the ways that you have interacted with us. And for the course of our lives, God, you have guided us. You strengthened us. You protected us. You have lifted us up when we have fallen down. You have forgiven us when we've needed your mercy. And you have continually led us to this moment in our lives, whether we are fourteen years old and listening to your Word or whether we are ninety-four years old and listening to your Word. Lord God, every one of our breaths has been a gift from you that we didn't deserve. Every heartbeat has been a gift from you that we did nothing to earn. They have all been gifts. And even if our hearts stop beating at fourteen, or our hearts stop beating today, every heartbeat, every breath up to this moment will have been a gift from you. And so we thank you for all the unseen ways in which you have guided our lives, all the unseen ways in which you have protected us, all the potential dangers and potential ways in which we could have fallen and we could have been destroyed. And yet, here we are today able to listen to your Word, able to receive your love, and able to love you in return. We thank you for this, and please help us to have that lens, the lens that no day is earned, but every day is a gift. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Dive **Deeper**

In prayer today, ask the Lord to give you the grace to detach from enemies of the past. Bring your wounds and your desire to live in freedom to him, and intercede for all of God's children, especially those listening to *The Bible in a Year*.

Our Story continues in Volume II ...

* Pius X, *Haerent Animo* (August 4, 1908), II, ewtn.com.

** John Henry Newman, "Meditations on Christian Doctrine: I. Hope in God—Creator," in *Meditations and Devotions of the Late Cardinal Newman* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1907), newmanreader.org.

*** Ambrose, *Letter 28 (50)*.6–7, in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament*, ed. Thomas C. Oden, vol. 3, *Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, ed. Joseph T. Lienhard (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 244, books.google.com.

APPENDICES

Reconciling Violence in the Bible with God's Love and Mercy

Throughout the Old Testament, there are various stories that make us question how we can understand the accounts of destruction and death, knowing that God is true love and mercy. How can we reconcile *herem* warfare (see Joshua 6–7)—which is the utter destruction of a city—or Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter (see Judges 11) with our understanding of a loving God?

The "cognitive dissonance" we might experience when reading these stories is understandable. But, as with all passages of the Bible, they must be read in context. In this period of salvation history, the context is sin. The sin here is primarily idolatry. To protect Israel from being drawn to the idol worship of the nations around them, God orders the destruction of these nations.

We should never have any anxiety that God's commands are arbitrary or seemingly contrary to his nature. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, "God's almighty power is in no way arbitrary." The *Catechism* continues, quoting St. Thomas Aquinas: "In God, power, essence, will, intellect, wisdom, and justice are all identical. Nothing therefore can be in God's power which could not be in his just will or his wise intellect" (CCC 271).

Since God is the primary author of the Bible, Scripture is inspired and inerrant. Therefore, when we read a text that distresses us, we must start our investigation by accepting every action of God as being completely consistent with his intellect, wisdom, and justice.

Here are some principles to keep in mind:

1. We need to "roll up our sleeves" and wrestle with the text. When we encounter violence and destruction, we study and pray, asking God to reveal the truth to us.

2. We cannot discount such stories simply because they are in the Old Testament—as if the God of the Old Testament is different from the God of the New. This is the heresy of Marcionism. There is one eternal God, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever! There is no dichotomy between God's revelation in the two parts of the Bible.

3. We need to be willing to wrestle with biblical ideas that seem to be opposed or contradictory. Everything in the Bible is complementary. God is both loving and judging. There is a time for war and a time for peace. God commands the destruction of Israel's enemies, but he does not delight in their death. His ways are not our ways, nor are his thoughts our thoughts (see Isaiah 55:8).

4. As a result of original sin, our intellects have been darkened and our wills weakened. In consequence, we see many evils committed by human beings —in the Bible, throughout history, and in the present day. God has given us free will, so he needs to ensure that his people are protected as much as possible from the evils practiced in the pagan nations around them.

5. Sin is more serious than we understand. It is so serious that God has sent his only Son to die on the Cross to save us from sin. It is through the greatest act of violence ever committed by mankind—the brutal torture and murder of Jesus Christ—that God has brought about the greatest blessing.

Bible Weights & Measures

(All measurements are approximate.)

Weight	Modern	Bible Verse
1 talent	75 lb.	Exodus 25:39
1 mina	1.26 lb.	1 Kings 10:17
1 shekel	40 oz.	Genesis 23:15
1 beka	20 oz.	Exodus 38:27
1 gerah	.02 oz.	Leviticus 27:25

Liquid Measures	Modern	Bible Verse
1 homer	55 gal.	Ezekiel 45:11
1 bath	5 gal.	Isaiah 5:10
1 hin	1 gal.	Exodus 29:40
1 log	.67 pints	Leviticus 14:10

Dry Measures	Modern	Bible Verse
1 kab	1.16 quarts	2 Kings 6:25
1 omer	2.09 quarts	Exodus 16:18
1 measure *(seah)*	⅔ peck	Genesis 18:6
1 ephah	½ bushel	1 Samuel 1:24
1 homer	6.5 bushels	Hosea 3:2

Length	Modern	Bible Verse
1 reed	8 ft. 9 in.	Ezekiel 40:3
1 cubit	17.5 in.	Luke 12:25
1 span	9 in.	Exodus 39:9
1 handbreadth	3 in.	1 Kings 7:26
1 finger	.75 in.	1 Kings 7:15
1 day's journey	20 miles	Numbers 11:31
1 stadi	606 ft.	Revelation 14:20
1 sabbath day's journey	3,637 ft.	Acts 1:12

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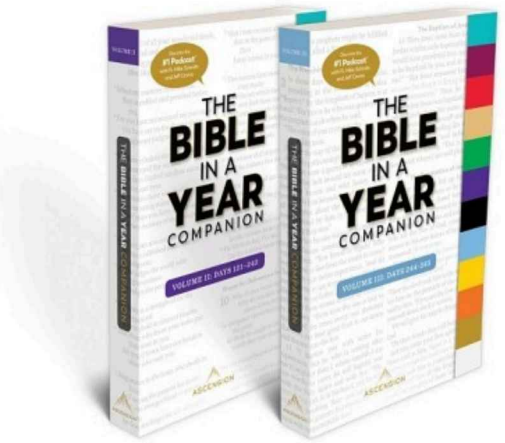

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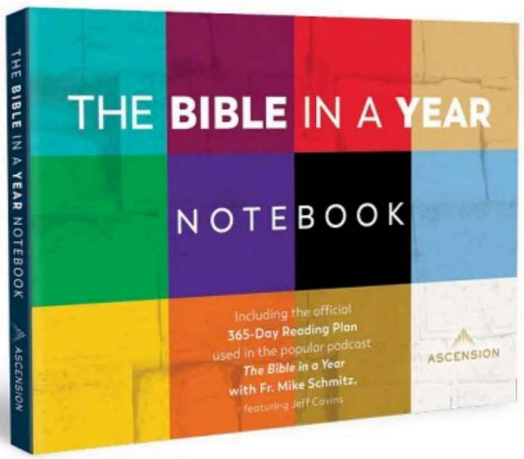

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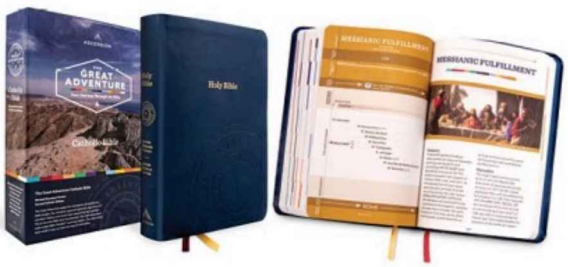

"**I have a lot of Bibles.** A lot: Blessed Is She, Word on Fire, King James, Ignatius, St. John's, Oxford ... a lot. **But this will be the last Bible I will ever purchase.**

Like so many, my life has been transformed by listening to *The Bible in a Year* podcast. But listening when driving or working was just not enough. I wanted to *sit* with God's Word, be with his Word.

I was almost tempted to believe that it was frivolous to buy another Bible. But, after just a week, **I could not imagine my journey through Genesis to Revelation without this precious treasure.** I have barely even looked at any other parts of it besides where Fr. Mike is reading from ... but I am **so impressed by the timelines, the size of the text, and the key points along the way**. I am thankful to have this particular Bible for my children as they grow in their faith and relationship with the Lord.

Thank you to Father Mike, Jeff Cavins, and everyone who thoughtfully and prayerfully put this Bible together for all of us who are yearning to be nourished by God's precious words!"

–Meaghan
June 19, 2021

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